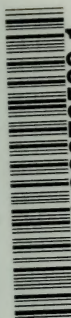


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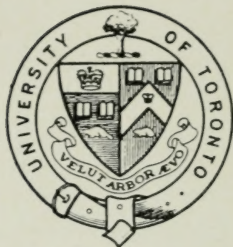
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FRANK H. SHAW



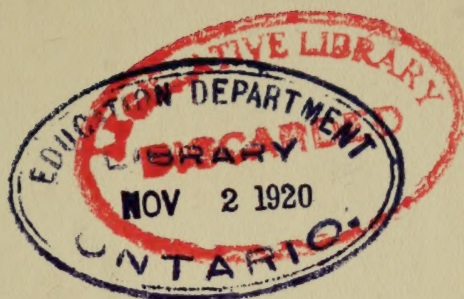
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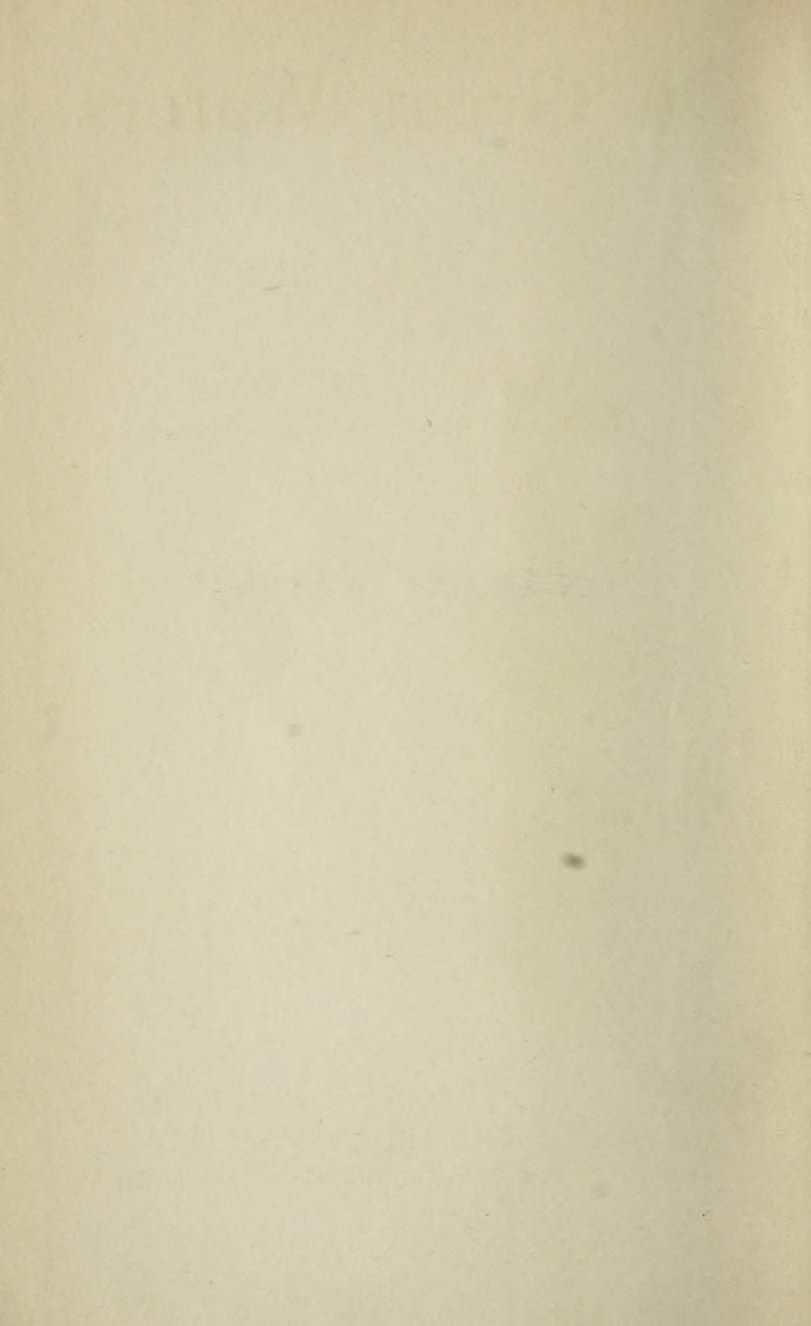
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ON GREAT WATERS



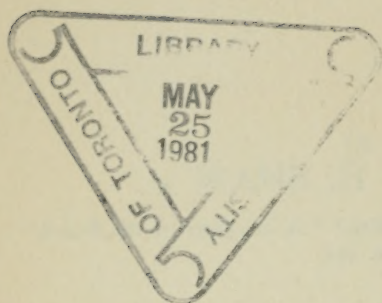
On Great Waters

BY
FRANK H. SHAW

Author of "The Haven of Desire," "A Daughter of the Storm,"
etc. etc.



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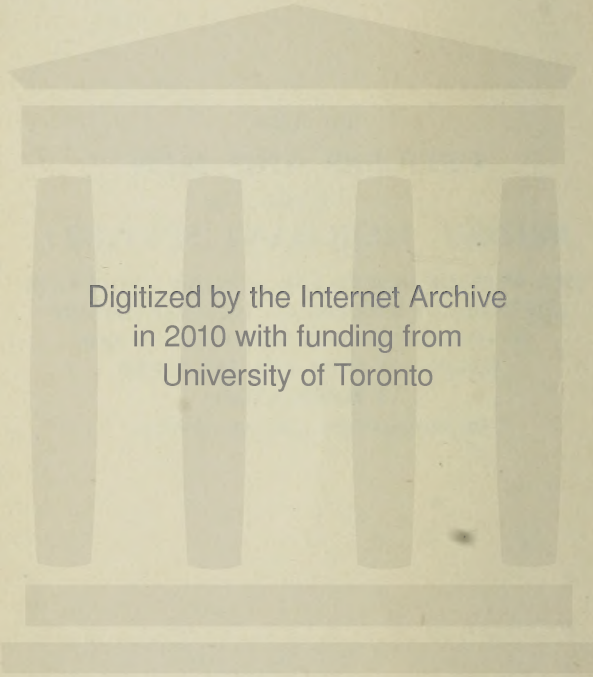
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TO THE
OFFICERS AND MEN
OF THE
BRITISH MERCHANT SERVICE :

WHO, BY THEIR LABOUR AND HEROISM, NOT ALWAYS
SUFFICIENTLY RECOGNISED, BROUGHT VICTORY
TO THE EMPIRE, THIS NARRATIVE OF THE
MAKING OF SOME FEW SAILORMEN
IS DEDICATED
IN ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE.]



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PREFACE

It is not felt that any apology is needed in presenting to the public a simple narrative of the sea and the men who use it.

Those who lived the life of hardship and stress such as is depicted inadequately in the following pages, were amongst the men who carried food to hungry mouths during almost five critical years in the world's history, when an unscrupulous enemy had counted on national hunger as its chiefest ally.

Presently, when values are adjusted, and the great perspective of the European War is correctly laid out before the eyes of the world, it will be seen that without the British Merchant Service a different tale had been told.

All through those years of inhumanity the Red Ensign kept the seas undaunted. More than fifteen thousand of such men as are feebly pictured within the pages of this book laid down their lives, far from the braying of trumpets and the flaunting of silken banners, in order that the swift-weaving shuttles of the Empire's looms might play their part in the construction of the great fabric of victory.

The Merchant Service supplied some fifteen thousand commissioned and warrant officers to the Royal Navy, in addition to performing its own onerous labours. It supplied almost numberless thousands of men in addition. It went to sea without guns; when

guns were supplied and enemy submarines developed a system of attack that rendered guns practically useless, it still went to sea.

No British merchant ship was ever delayed in its sailing by reason of the refusal of its crew to face the known risks of voyaging through the danger zones.

The enemy counted the Merchant Service a combatant force, and treated it accordingly. Only the Empire calls it a non-combatant service.

And the Merchant Service is winning the peace to-day.

F. H. S.

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ON GREAT WATERS

CHAPTER I

OUTWARD BOUND

IN the yellow-grey gloom of the winter's dawning the ship looked unkempt, grimy, purely revolting, and such few men as moved about her unclean decks fitted in well with their stage-setting. Outside the locked dock-gates the troubled surface of the famous estuary foamed and hissed, the venomous waves slapped with spiteful anticipation at the timbers that kept them in check, and over all that murky, white-veined expanse the rain slanted in purposeful sheets that beat down the whitecaps momentarily into one pitted wilderness of desolation, until the next rasping squall roared down and threshed the water again into added liveliness. It promised to become a regular Mersey day, which means general beastliness for the sailorman; and the mate, thick-headed and grim, what of overnight potations—for even the mate of a sailing ship can find friends to bid him *bon voyage* so long as he puts up the drinks to correspond—gave his unbiased opinion on all the seas and all the ships upon them in language such as he considered fitting to the occasion.

“A swine’s son of a day” was his most publishable expression, and he repeated it with cumulative fervency, until the second mate, who had left a girl behind him, and who, in the sober reality of sailing morning, began to feel doubts as to feminine con-

stancy, found excuse to leave the sodden poop and rush to the waist, whence his voice—and it was a metallic, rasping voice that set nerves on edge—came jarringly as he “hazed” the bewildered crew about such duties as were requisite.

It was a morning of soured tempers, of aching heads and bruised bodies, of half-coherent repentances and regrets. It was, in a word, an average sailing day for some thirty ocean Ishmaels, who individually and collectively knew amazement at the evil fortune that had caused them to undertake to perform the whole and sole duty of a seaman upon great waters. There were no braying bands to add a touch of romance to the pending departure; there was no promise that, at an appointed time, a vast watching concourse of humanity would break into cheers and handkerchief wavings. Even the ship’s ensign was not hoisted, though the tugs were already getting ready to move. For she was a cheap ship, run economically, earning but a narrow margin of profit, and bunting costs dearly, and ensigns must be used circumspectly, lest they wear out too quickly.

“Ugh! Who’d sell a farm and go to sea?” demanded the skipper, shivering in his oilskins and pyjamas. “Pilot aboard yet?”

The mate spat emphatically over the rail and said: “Not yet, sir. Trust him; he won’t skip out of his blankets a minute before he need. He knows which side his bread’s buttered. Wish I was a pilot—all night in!”

The expression on the captain’s rubicund face might have led an observer to opine that he, for one, would not have cared to trust his command to the handling of the dishevelled officer before him.

“And the hands are drunk still,” added the mate, in the tone of one with a perpetual grievance. “Drunk as the devil—drunker. Couldn’t get a wink of sleep for them coming aboard. One feller started scrapping, too. I thought he’d waken you, sir, so I—so I——”

He indicated his mighty clenched fist, the knuckles whereof were not a little abraded, as from the effects of striking a solid substance forcibly.

"A bit of Western Ocean fashion, eh?" asked the captain without displaying very keen interest. The mate snorted: there was a grain of sycophancy in his composition, and he had expected praise for his hazing tactics. You often found that combination of bully and toady in sailing ship days; but coupled with these undesirable traits were, more often than not, a very real courage in difficulty and a thorough and cunning craftsmanship.

There was very much to be done, and but few to perform it, for not all the hands were yet in fit condition to turn to, thanks to cheap grog and a month's advance of pay on account of services yet to be rendered. By the wording of the articles they had recently signed at the neighbouring shipping office, they were to be aboard by midnight; but the precise condition in which they should join was not specified, and, anyway, it was the last night ashore for the Lord only knew how long. And there was money: such balance as remained after accounts were squared with the boarding-house keepers who had housed them from the day of their landing from half a dozen ships that had returned from Punta Arenas and Port Pirrie, from 'Frisco and Sourabaya, from Java and Portland, Oregon—from any one of the ports still used by windjammers in an age when steam rules triumphant on the world's wide seas. Money to be spent, not hoarded—who'd carry money to sea?

And now certain of the more thorough of the ship's complement still lay in the bunks into which they had been flung on arrival, and their stertorous snores resounded defiantly as we of the half-deck chanced to pass the open fo'c'stle doors. Such as had sobered were working: cutting down the running rigging which had been stopped to the shrouds to keep it clear of dirt and grease; battening down the

untidy hatches; getting the anchors over—for sometimes a readily dropped anchor will save a master's certificate. The carpenter was overhauling the steering gear aft; and we boys, the soberest of all, were working like men, here, there, and everywhere, because it is at such times as these that the "gentlemen ropehaulers" are invaluable: the reliable members of the crew, who, in addition to being sober, know their way about the ship, know the whims of the officers, and have learnt the futility of grouching and scrimshanking by sore experience.

"Hi! send a couple of the boys aft!"

"One of you boys give the carpenter a hand, here!"

"Up aloft, one of you boys, and cut the stops on that topsail halliard!"

"Tell one of the boys to chase the pigs into their pen!"

There were eight of us who answered the official designation. Some of us were second-voyagers, and we considered ourselves the equals of old, tried men. Perhaps we were; we had endured fifteen months of sea-life, and we had learnt very much in the way of handiness, because it saved trouble to pick up things smartly. Such newcomers to the life of the sea as there were mooned aimlessly about the cluttered decks, getting into everyone's way, stubbing their unfortunate toes against unexpected ringbolts, falling victims to swiftly descending tangles of rope: willing enough, one and all, to help, but pitifully ignorant of what to do; sneered at, it is to be feared, by such of us as had been in exactly their positions little more than a year ago; blasted and damned by mate and second mate as being useless hamper: the victims of cadgers from the forecabin, who had come aboard short of soap and matches. Useless then, perhaps, and as miserable as useless, because what they had already seen of sailing ship life utterly failed to come up to their expectations and ideals; but young Tom-

linson, who was still red about the eyes, who wore bran-new and unwashed dungarees, from which the rich dye was already streaming, was that same Tomlinson who earned a V.C. the other day when in charge of a "Q" boat; and an unknown grave within a month of receiving a not hastily-bestowed honour; and Cameron, of the fiery locks and the sloppy mouth, Cameron of the decayed teeth and the eternal snuffle, Cameron picked up a C.B. and many other things for saving the entire crew of a torpedoed cruiser, though enemy submarines were still about; and in that day his ship lacked even a rifle by way of armament.

We boys had not drifted aimlessly aboard at the last minute. We had been fetched from our homes, where we had swaggered largely in badge-caps and brass-bound jackets amongst our late schoolfellows, telling stiff yarns of pirates and desert islands, a full week before, in order to perform those countless duties which are necessary before a sailing ship is ready to proceed to sea. That is, the oldsters of us had joined. We were cheap, and we understood the work; and we had stowed cargo beneath the deck-beams; we had washed down and swept down; we had repaired the rigging and bent the sails; we had man-handled the stores into their respective receptacles; and we had fared hardly enough, because though the half-deck was supplied with a stove, no one had thought it worth his while to order coals aboard until the day before sailing day; and but for chance lumps stolen or begged from steamers, we had no means of kindling a fire.

It was not for us to complain, though we did complain. We hurled anathemas on the heads of the shipowners, calling them skinflints and cheeseparers and sailors' robbers; but this we did in secret, lest the ever-present fear of receiving a bad discharge at the completion of our indentures should eventuate into reality. For a bad discharge meant that our sea-time would not count when we went up for second mate,

and we none of us desired to stay in a subordinate capacity any longer than could be helped. We had been hazed and "worked up"; we had done many things that we had not counted on doing, and we desired, in the appointed time, to order other boys to do the same!

Our parents had paid varying sums to earn us these privileges of hard work, harder living, and indifferent food. I believe, nowadays, the seagoing apprentice finds his lines have fallen in pleasanter places than were common at the time of which I write; there are certificated cooks aboard the windjammers; boys are taught other things than cleaning out pigpens and second mates' cabins; but in my day the owners did not construe the terms of our indentures as we ourselves did. We were exactly as the forecastle hands, except that we did not share their privileges, and we received no pay beyond a certain proportion of our premiums returned in the form of wages. And there were eight of us, who, with some ten deckhands, completed the actual working crew of the two-thousand-ton barque. Some of the company's ships, we knew, carried sixteen apprentices and eight deckhands, and we said bitter things about such owners as ran their ships on practically nothing for wages. But we worked all the same, although we growled; and I do not think we were any the worse for the working. It hardened our muscles and filled us out into the semblance of men; it taught us self-reliance and the ability to take care of ourselves under most conditions; and the German has since discovered the worth of our teaching in that, despite his gloomiest threats, the Merchant Service carried on much the same as before.

In the raw gloom we "singled in," and the heavy mooring-chains that had fastened the ship to the quay for many a day grazed our hands and wearied our muscles. The night watchman had been asleep, and consequently there had been no hot coffee at turn-to;

but—well, it was all part of the scheme of things. And in a little while we should be clear of northern chills and mists, basking in everlasting sunshine, our cheeks fanned by the steady Trades. That the Easting, with its endless succession of gales, its floating ice, its bitter frigidity, lay ahead again of the Tropics we cared not; we lived in the main from day to day, and trouble was bad enough in the actuality, without seeking for it in advance.

A purple-faced, bewrapped man, carrying a small handbag, clambered across the insufficient gangway; a couple of fussy tugs cast loose from their moorings and, veiled by monstrous clouds of smoke, heralded by strident whistlings, moved towards us. Heaving-lines were thrown, ropes were hauled aboard and made fast with turn on turn on the bitts. The agents' runner made his appearance, but we were still one man short. He had arrived aboard the night before, and he had created a disturbance in the forecabin; now he was missing.

On the wharf, shivering in the wind's fierce bite, clad sketchily in ragged jackets and dungarees, with battered bowlers surmounting all, stood a little knot of men under control of a beefy person, warmly dressed and exuding an air of prosperity. "Pier-head jumpers" these tatterdemalions: men willing to join at the last moment to replace others not forthcoming. In answer to a shout, the boarding-house runner marshalled his crowd aboard, and the mate eyed them sourly. They were not at all an inviting selection; and the mate was as certain as they themselves were that their discharges were anything but good. Sterling men did not need to "jump" ships at the last moment; they could sign on in the ordinary way, presenting their discharges unashamed. Only men with "Decline to report" against their names—and "Decline to report" is tantamount to "Bad," "Very Bad," or "Disgraceful," according to the construction an engaging officer cares to put upon it—

need to permit themselves to be smuggled into a berth. Not that your man with a black mark against his name is always your worst sailor, however. Far from it. And I have known men with very blemished records perform deeds of heroism that deserve to be recorded in bright gold on pure white vellum.

"I'll take the nigger," said the mate; "he seems the best of a bad lot"; and without further ado a grinning black, his face ashen grey beneath its sable epidermis, was hastened to the cabin, where he signed articles in the good old-fashioned way, by touching the pen, whilst the shipping clerk actually wrote down "George Washington Hassell" in the place appointed. A lean—a very lean—kit-bag was tossed aboard from the cartload that stood on the quay, and with it was a "donkey's breakfast," or straw bed.

"Step along, Snowball," said the mate hoarsely.

"My name Hassell, sah! My name no' Snowball," expostulated the black.

"Your name's 'Move Quick' just now. Get for'ard, and no back chat." The darkey moved, influenced by something in the mate's bloodshot eye. The boarding-house runner slipped ashore, pocketing the negro's advance note, which entitled him to receive the lordly sum of three pounds as soon as the ship had sailed. Not much money, in these spacious days, but it represented a solid month's hardship, that was almost slavery, privation, discomfort, and indeed bitter suffering; and not a penny would be credited to our latest recruit's account until the "dead horse" was worked off. True, he had had, or was supposed to have had, accommodation and food in advance to the equivalent value of his month's wages, and he had been supplied with an outfit; but later it came out that he had been paid off with fifty good pounds a fortnight before, and in some fashion he had contrived to lose it, or spend it recklessly, and—the boarding-house keeper had probably got the most of it.

But at this moment there were other matters to interest us apprentices than pier-head jumpers. Rumours had gone about, but nothing was known for certain. The mate, when questioned, had snarled grumpily; the steward refused to answer yea or nay. But, as the fussy tugs made fast—one ahead on a shortened hawser, one on the quarter to aid the steering—a slim, girlish figure appeared on the poop, and even the ungainly oilskin coat she wore could not disguise her sex.

"Skipper's daughter's coming, after all," said Crowther. "Bit of luck for us, eh? What's she like?"

"A good-looker, if her photograph's anything to go by," said "Slumgullion," whose other name was Courtenay. "I saw it last trip when I was down in the old man's room. I'll go aft and see." He cocked his shocking cap rakishly on three hairs, and sped briskly to the sacred eminence, affecting to have a job of work to do about the wheelbox. We watched him, glorying in his pluck, yet apprehensive, for the skipper was no man to be baited. But we saw Slumgullion halt beside the girl. It was evident he spoke to her, for he raised his cap, slid his hands into his pockets, and adopted the attitude of a conversationalist. We envied and admired, but we were chased away to work, and it was not until later that we heard Slumgullion's report.

"A regular peach," he whispered to me, as we tailed on to a rope together. "Must have had a good-looking mother, because the old man's nothing to brag about. Free and easy, too—yarned away, goodo! Ripping, I call it."

Let such as have endured long voyages in sail, going for many months at a stretch without even sighting land, without hearing any voice but the rasping voices of shipmates, without seeing other than grimy, bearded, sun- and sea-bronzed faces, agree with me as to the suggestion of pleasure that the

presence aboard of a woman promised. Young as we were, we were not altogether unconscious of the mystery of the sex: calf-love stirred within us.

"I'll bet the old man'll keep a pretty close eye on her," grumbled Crowther. "No spooning under the break of the poop with this captain's lovely daughter."

"She isn't the googoo-eyed kind," said Slumgullion. "Talks to you rather decently, as if she were a man herself."

"Get for'ard, you boys, and stand by the hauling-lines," bellowed the skipper from the poop, and the impromptu conference broke up forthwith.

The rain, that had been thin hitherto, was now settling down to a vicious pour; the wind rose from a whimpering moan to a scream on occasion. We shivered in anticipation: a gale blowing up and narrow waters to negotiate; many all-hands' jobs we knew lay before us.

"A stinking sou'wester, too," growled Crowther, who saw but little good in life. But growl as we might, go we must, as the sea-law ordained. The six-inch ropes were hard as toughened steel. Cold and muddy, our hands as yet had not become thoroughly hardened after a couple of months' leisure ashore. Had we not poulticed those same hands when running up-Channel on the homeward passage, in order to cleanse them of tar and paint? There was much pully-hauley, more bad language, some threats, some sullenness. A tattered faggot of a woman, the paint on her face ruddled by the slashing rain, her hat askew, still stale-drunk, danced wildly on the pier-head as we passed slowly through, and demanded the life's blood of some man unknown. We were in no chivalrous mood. Who it was who threw the sodden lump of shakings that caught the virago clean in the abuse-spewing mouth I do not know; but the tirade was cut short in choking gurgles, and answered by hoarse laughter.

"Who's the joker who didn't pay his washer-woman?" asked the mate cynically. "It's asking for trouble."

Into the river we passed, the clamour from the pier-head diminishing as we increased our distance; the tow-rope was lengthened, the stern tug cast off. Aft at the wheel someone struck eight bells.

"Breakfast," said the mate. "Aft, one o' you boys, and tell the second mate I want him. Half o' you get your breakfasts, and look smart. Port watch, break off—breakfast!"

It was not a luxurious meal by any means. It consisted of a cut-down butter-tin full of acrid coffee, milkless, a kit of beans swimming in greasy water, and a loaf of bread. As yet, small stores had not been issued; they would come when the steward had leisure from his multifarious duties; but we didn't care overly. Our well-laden tuck-boxes were as yet far from exhausted, for we had fed ashore as often as was possible, and until our money ran out. We had butter and tinned milk and marmalade, and there were still a few stalish eggs. One of the youngsters acted as "Peggy"—the fagging system still prevails in wind-jammers—and stumbled along the unsavoury deck with the butter-tin and mess-kit; we were sharp-set after several hours of by no means negligible work.

Conjure up, if you will, a picture of our quarters. According to the advertisements in the papers, inserted by money-hungry outfitters in search of innocents, who guaranteed berths to such as purchased an expensive and useless outfit from them, we were "berthed and messed aft under kind, Christian officers, who took a delight in teaching us the whole and sole duty of accomplished seamen." But if you had looked for maple-wood panelling, velvet settee cushions, spotless table linen, and shining cutlery, you would have looked in vain. Our half-deck was an iron deckhouse, twelve feet square. Two sides were occupied by bunks, eight in number, of roughly

painted wood; splendid harbourage they afforded for creeping, biting things, too! Lockers that left much to be desired in cleanliness ornamented the end by the door—high-silled, this door, lest solid water should encroach and render life unbearable. In the intervening space was a table, constructed to slide up to the roof on plain wood stanchions, and thus give us more space when we were not actually at meals, or using the table. The table itself was a plain deal board, nominally white, but actually a dingy brown. Tablecloths were a thing unknown, and as no one aboard the ship took enough interest in our life below decks to care a hang about our personal cleanliness and the cleanliness of our surroundings, we, being average boys, cared about as much, and let things slide. Our scant leisure was too scant to be wasted in putting a superficial polish on our eating gear, and our general disposition was to let "watch below jobs" look after themselves.

For seats we had our sea-chests and nothing beside. Stenchful oilskins hung on the forward bulkhead; we stowed our wet and dirty clothing anywhere: in the food-lockers, at foot of our bunks, in our chests, and prayed that rain would fall heavily fairly soon, in order that we might wash our duds before we were compelled to change shirts with one another for lack of clean ones!

Yet there was little enough to complain of, really, although, when in bitter mood, we did complain greatly. I think that our principal feeling was a sense that the owners had somehow got us there under false pretences. They had, we contended, fooled the innocent and unwary. Not one of us, queerly enough, knew anything about sailing ships—deep-water sailing ships, that is—before signing our indentures, which were framed especially in favour of the ship-owner and against the apprentice's interests. I suppose the owners acted rightly according to their lights. In those days there was always a plentiful supply of

romantic lads whom nothing would satisfy but the sea. We did not understand, prior to our initiation into the grim reality, that sea-life consisted of savage bodily labour, scant fare, and no consideration. We imagined a life of picturesque *dolce far niente*, I suppose; the thought of work did not enter into our dreams. But we had our eyes opened very thoroughly within a very short time of first setting foot aboard.

Matters are better arranged now, I am given to understand. The half-deck apprentice is actually looked upon as an embryo officer, and treated as such. Frankly, and without a desire to grouse unnecessarily, we, of the old windjammer days, were not so regarded; we were simply so many working hands, and cheap ones, for we received not a cent of the owner's money in return for our varied and toilsome labours.

Our owners, I am firmly convinced—they were a byword even at sea for meanness and general lack of sportsmanship in their outlook on life—did not realise that we were premium apprentices at all. They had been shipmasters in earlier days. Dark stories were told of the means by which they won to fortune, and it was currently believed that the senior partner had laid the keel of his success by running slaves along the Dahomey coast!—when such a thing as a premium apprentice was hardly known; when the first stage of learning to be a deck hand was to be apprenticed to a shipmaster for a term of years; and, so far as they were concerned, we came into the same category. I distinctly remember one of the owners, after a very brief conversation with a fellow apprentice, who was a public school boy, and whose father held high rank in the Royal Navy, saying to me: “He seems quite an intelligent boy for an apprentice lad.”

But, bless my soul, we didn't care overmuch. We groused freely, as is the privilege of sailors, old and young; we shirked work as much as was possible; we loafed as soon as an officer's eye was removed from

us; but we were as happy as sandboys in reality, because we were young, as hard as nails, and with never a real care in all the world. And if we abused the ship amongst ourselves with vitriolic vituperation, let any man so much as speak a word against her in our hearing, and that man was for trouble, or—more often—we were. Bloody noses, blackened eyes, and missing teeth told the tale of our battling in cafés and dens of low repute for the honour of our ship!

So, growling ever, we ate our meal, and hardly was the last mouthful down than we were compelled to snatch up our caps—uncovering our heads at meal-times was our one concession to the decencies—and hurry forth to permit the rest of our fellows to slip below and gulp down a hasty meal.

It was raining insistently when we took over; drenching rain that percolated through our new oil-skins with a dreary persistence. Everything we had to handle was wet and foul; but we were heartened by our meal, and in a left-handed fashion we even indulged in jokes and horseplay. Not that lightness of heart was encouraged. The general maxim in those days was that, as the officers were down in the mouth, they permitted none other to remain happy.

“Too much food, not enough work,” grunted the second mate, who had taken over from his senior. “But I’ll straighten you cubs out when once I set about you.”

“You’ll do a fat lot of hazing,” remarked Slumgullion. It was direct insubordination, unquestionably, but it was a deliberate feeler; we desired to test the mettle of this new overseer of ours, on whom much depended in future. If he picked up the flung-down gauntlet and “went for” our messmate, we should stand by and see fair play; if he proved the victor we should study to bear the blow until one or other of us was fit and ready to take up the cudgels on the general behalf.

“I’m the man who’ll make you sick and sorry for

cutting across my hawse, and pretty soon, too," roared the second mate. "I've licked better men than any of you with one hand tied behind me."

"In your dreams!" sneered Slumgullion rudely. For a moment it seemed as though the new officer would devour him at a mouthful; but his raised arm fell back to his side, and—the victory was to our side! Everyone knew it as definitely as if the battle had actually occurred and the second mate proved the vanquished. There was no getting away from it. He had tried to "put up a bluff," and it had weakened at the critical moment; there was nothing behind his threats.

Credit us with average decency. Do not for a moment believe that we desired to turn the ship into a very bear garden of undiscipline. Nothing of the sort. We were boys, and we wanted to know where we stood with this new ruler of ours. We had heard yarns about him being something of a bully when he could get away with it; and we never took any advantage of the lesson we had learned. That is to say, our manner to the second mate never bordered on the insolent in the ordinary course of duty. His orders were as readily obeyed as the captain's own; but we understood that the "work-up" jobs would not always be given to the boys now, as had been the case in his last ship, according to rumour. We were really taking up the cudgels on behalf of our kind; we were regarding that precious possession, the honour of the half-deck, although I doubt if any of us was conscious of the fact.

For in those days there was something of a constant feud between the apprentices and the "after-guard." Perhaps the half-deck was to blame. I dare not say anything to the contrary; but there can be no doubt that the majority of us premium apprentices were constantly smarting under a sense of injustice, and when, added to the permanent smart, came a suggestion that an officer should tyrannise

over us in an endeavour to curry favour with the fore-castle hands, we were disposed to straighten the matter out without any loss of time.

"Stand by that cork fender, Slumgullion," said the second mate. Further proof of victory, and we exulted accordingly. Our messmate had been called by his shipboard nickname—not a small concession—and it was told to us in that trivial utterance that the war would not be carried to extremes. Neither was it, as the event proved.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the lad; and the ordinary run of work was resumed, with the suggestion of a freer atmosphere all about us. We laboured much more willingly now. We laughed and jested about things that had happened during our concluded spell ashore; and we also saw that the deck hands did a fair share of the general toil, the second mate over-seeing it.

We were now fairly outward bound; the tide served handsomely, and the tug got fairly into its stride. There was nothing required in the way of tending the ship. Not for hours and many hours would it be necessary to set more canvas than the fore-and-afters. But there were endless duties required of us, and the first day out is inevitably an all hands day. Presently the mate came along and relieved the second, permitting him to go below for a delayed breakfast, and we dared not try any tricks with the senior officer. Second mates are fair game, being in the main but apprentices newly out of their time, or old dug-outs who have failed to make good in steam; but mates are very different persons indeed—tried men of much experience, to be obeyed with a snap.

Our chief officer was a much-soured man. We had had him with us the previous voyage, and knew all there was to know about him. None of us, I think, was particularly ambitious to be enrolled in his watch when the time came for choosing. He

had scant tolerance for boyish weaknesses. He insisted on the timekeeping apprentice walking the lee side of the poop; he tried his utmost to keep the entire watch on deck—so far as the apprentices were concerned—awake even in fine weather. He had been in command of a very fine ship in his day. He told one of us once, in a moment of expansion, that she was a clipper, run on the lines of a clipper, with a foremast crew of twenty-five hands, a dozen apprentices and some few midshipmen, together with trimmings in the way of boatswains and boatswains' mates; but he had "swallowed the anchor" after a few voyages, and had settled down ashore to gain a livelihood there.

There is a very keen ambition amongst many sailormen to settle down to shore life. In many cases, to be sure, there is a girl at the bottom of this desire—in ninety per cent. of cases, at a rough estimate. When a sailor finds a girl to suit him he generally finds a quite average girl, one of the kind who, being married, prefer to share the benefits of that excellent condition as well as its occasional drawbacks. That is, he finds a girl who has no wish to be a widow for the greater part of every year, as a pukka sailor's wife must necessarily be. She is not to blame; the lot of a deep-sea sailor's wife a dozen years or so ago was anything but enviable. And in many an engagement there was a definite understanding that before marriage a shore berth should be secured. The mistake these aspirants for earthly honours usually made was in seeking for a job that had some immediate connection with seafaring. They went for dockmaster's jobs, harbour-master's berths; shore skipper was a position to attract. They forgot that for every possible vacancy there were probably at least two hundred applicants, whereas, if they had boldly cut free from the sea altogether, and relied on the well-known fact of a sailing-ship trained man's handiness at anything he

cares to take up, if they had gone inland and proved to employers what resources they possessed, I am convinced they must have met with better success than many of them did.

Our mate had started his shore career as partner in a sail-loft. He had invested his hard-earned savings to the last penny in the concern—and his partner was one of those whose delight it is to shear the lambs of the sea. That was the story in a nutshell. He was swindled right and left, and after some few years of struggle was perforce compelled to return to his old-time mistress, the sea. The girl he had worked for found another admirer who could offer her more attractions. But the company he had previously served had gone out of business completely, after selling such few of their ships as still remained to foreign owners. So Mr. Perkins was unknown amongst the shipowners; there were no commands offering, and here he was with us, working up seniority, and further removed from obtaining command than he had been fifteen years before. Our owners gave him £8 a month and his keep, and when he asked for more, told him—so he assured us in those few expansive moments which came to him—they could get as many qualified chief officers for £7 a month as they liked to ask for.

He was a curious type, an all too common type in those now remote days—a man in whom ambition had died, a mere bit of nautical flotsam. When in a home port he had no real home that anyone knew of. He lived in cheap rooms in a district near the docks, and he found such elementary pleasures as sailormen are apt to find ashore. He was sick of the land and sick of the sea, and he was really content to drift casually on, “come day, go day, God send Sunday,” until such time as it should please the Fates to send him overboard in a cloth of worn canvas, with a couple of holystones at his feet to make sure of his speedy sinking.

But, spite of his lack of ambition, he was a very perfect sailorman, and the captain himself was not above drawing him into consultation when difficulties arose—a great concession, be it noted, for your wind-jammer skipper was a mighty autocrat, with an aloofness that would make a king's solitude appear as clamorous crowds by comparison. There was, I think, no trick of ship-handling he was not conversant with; and the story went that he had once actually club-hauled his ship, than which there was no more delicate manœuvre in all the gamut of seamanship. And, further, for his meagre £8 a month he gave our cheeseparing owners a faithful, loyal service beyond description. He studied their interests in a thousand ways. He was jealous of the ship's smartness, he supervised the stowing of every ounce of her cargo, he watched it so that not a package should be looted; at sea he spared no effort to maintain the vessel in perfect working order, and spent many of his watches below in overseeing repairs and alterations. He appeared to have not a single thought outside the fabric; and she was hardly a ship to breed pride in a ship-lover's heart, for, all said and done, she was merely a 2,000-ton steel-built barque, square-bottomed, cheaply built, a mere masted and sparred warehouse of the kind that is built by the mile and cut off by the hundred yards or so, lacking in beauty, nothing to boast of in regard to speed, a pig in bad weather, and a heart-breaking brute in light winds and calms. Yet, such as she was, she bred up some spirit of sea pride in the mate's toughened, soured soul; and he even went to the length of buying books of gold leaf and fine brushes out of his own pocket for the purpose of glorifying her ugly figure-head!

It was good service to be bought at a price of less than £100 a year. And for twelve hours out of twenty-four he had the safety of the ship on his shoulders—no light burden, considering some of the

weather she had to cope with. The handling of the men was his concern. He was required to maintain discipline amongst twenty-odd people who were by nature antagonistic to all his caste, and who, in addition, were cooped up in a narrow space for many months at a stretch, a state of existence which goes often to bring out the worst nature of mankind.

He did it, aided by some tradition of the sea and a lot of his own personality. He was wholesomely feared on every hand; he had never to speak twice to ensure a command's fulfilment. Men spoke in whispers when he was about, and yet I never once saw him offer actual violence.

There was a great deal of work before us before the ship was ready to commence her long fight against the sea. In home ports any vessel becomes more or less of a rubbish heap. Refuse is dumped indiscriminately about her decks and in every obscure corner, because there are penalties inflicted for the throwing overboard of such rubbish. A week is sufficient to make a yacht look dishevelled and obscene, and the ——— had been lounging about the docks for a couple of months and more. Imagine her, littered as to scupper with galley sweepings, grimed everywhere with layer on layer of coal dust and soot from a hundred tramps' funnels, muddied by the feet of numberless stevedores, loose straw and broken wood piled in every open space, spare dunnage stacked forward and aft, a welter of iron-hard hauling lines and harder wires that had been used for her moorings, and the unkindly mooring cables themselves thrown down anyhow! A heart-breaking sight she was, enough to breed despair in a good ship's husband's heart, and the mate said as much. He also said he would have her as white as a hound's tooth before a single hand aboard knew the meaning of rest. So we turned to to tackle this cleansing of the apparent Augean stables. And gradually order

resolved itself out of chaos. The dunnage was stowed away on top of the cargo, though there was the stipulated amount on the floors of the holds too; the loose rubbish was unceremoniously flung overboard; the unwanted ropes and wires were coiled away down the forepeak; the terrible mooring chains were grappled with, at the expense of human skin. Every two hours a hand would adjust his oilskins, watch his opportunity to slip below for a few surreptitious whiffs at his pipe, and then trudge aft to relieve the wheel, or forward to relieve the look out; and usually these duties fell to the boys, as the hands themselves were not fit to be entrusted with responsible work, on account of their intoxication. Some humorist or other amongst the new crew had contrived to smuggle bottles of rot-gut liquor aboard, and this was apparently shared out indiscriminately amongst all who cared to stanch that morning-after thirst, which is particularly aggravating when the last night ashore has been as hectic as the windjammer sailor's average last night ashore usually is. The natural result was that the forecastle hands got less sober as the day progressed, and the further consequence was that more and more work fell on the shoulders of the boys, until the mate scented what was afoot and deemed it necessary to take action.

He plunged into the port forecastle, and sounds of a violent altercation ensued almost at once. The crew resented his appearance amongst them; their fo'c'sle was no place for the tread of an officer's foot. They were in a nasty temper enough. Two of them at least were fighting drunk and in a mood for murder; and we youngsters, gathering round door and porthole, looked forward with some considerable pleasure to witnessing a regular "boot and belaying-pin" rough house. Some of us had sailed shipmates with men who had actually served on those notorious Yankee hell-ships, where every command was introduced by a savage blow, and where mates used green-

heart belaying-pins on every conceivable occasion. We had heard bloodcurdling stories of unrevealed tragedies, of men's heads burst open with weighty setting-fids, of promiscuous pistol work, of all the brutal atrocities committed in the sacred name of discipline that sailor's memory could remember or his imagination conceive, and we hoped for a glimpse of the real thing.

But we were doomed to disappointment. Mr. Perkins used no actual violence that we were witness to; he did not even raise his voice; but shortly after his entrance two men stumbled out into the dingy light of day, and two more followed them. Then the mate appeared, with a frowning face, and, walking to the rail, threw overboard three bottles, which evidently contained grog. Still the explosion did not come, though we had heard the hands growl terrible threats against lawful authority if it interfered with their programme.

From the port fore-castle the mate proceeded to the starboard, and re-enacted his rôle of moral custodian, again without voiced protest, and again the would-be debauchees rolled out to duty—all, that is, save such as were totally incapacitated by the liquor they had already consumed. No, it did not come up to our expectations in the least; but later reflection leads me to believe that Mr. Perkins showed no inconsiderable courage in venturing unarmed amongst a number of men whose tempers were ruffled, who were utter strangers to him in every way, and who were selected from half the nations of Europe. Because, as I say, these men were ripe for mischief, and very serious mischief at that. Not one of them but was labouring under a sense of wrong; they had all been victimised to some extent; authority was a lifelong enemy; and what more likely than that they should have blazed out in open aggression under such conditions? I have seen men with much less of a "black dog" on them resort to vicious

violence on other occasions; but then they had not a Mr. Perkins to handle them.

This question of discipline in merchant wind-jammers has always been something of a mystery to me. It must be that age-old tradition is at the back of it, for there is very little else. Even a merchant captain, whilst paramount in some respects, is endowed with merely microscopic powers of rule. The commanding officer of a warship has definite power as laid down by King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions. He can punish a recalcitrant severely, and make the punishment fit the crime. He has strictly trained men to rule, men who have been caught young and taught that the Navy is their father and their mother. To maintain discipline under such conditions is not a difficult task. Petty officers of long service have the guidance of more youthful hands than themselves. These wise men instil in the youngsters a spirit of wholesome awe of constituted authority. There is the dignity of the King's service inculcated in the naval seaman from his youth up. He is uniformed, he is drilled, he learns at the commencement that good conduct brings reward and misbehaviour means drastic punishment. He is taught something of the art of playing for his side—that the ship is bigger than the crew. He knows that continued good behaviour brings advancement, ultimate pension for his elder years. Contrast with this state of affairs the position of the merchant service officer as it was in those not very remote days of which I write.

The average sailing-ship crew was a polyglot assortment of men; men who seldom sailed two voyages in the same ship under the same owners. They knew on joining that a period of brutal hard work lay before them. They were likely to be actually at sea for perhaps four months at a stretch, without sighting land or indeed another ship. They knew that they would be lucky if, on reaching a port, they

were permitted ashore for one single Sunday, with five or ten shillings of the pay they had hardly earned, given grudgingly to them to spend. They were vilely fed, and they were not able to purchase additional delicacies to augment the rigorous Board of Trade allowance of food. Daily issues of grog were unknown, save on such occasions as necessitated a prolonged period of tremendous exertion by all hands, under terrible weather conditions, and even then a tot of grog was only given if the captain was so minded. They were hard worked under the best circumstances of wind and weather; whilst at sea they kept a strict watch and watch, and had to get their meals in their watch below. They were indifferently paid—£2 10s. or £3 a month was considered a handsome wage. They could only keep themselves personally clean when there was sufficient rain to permit of washing water being collected. Apart from this they were kept down to an allowance of three bare quarts of water per diem for all purposes, including cooking and drinking.

They had never worked together before. They had, in the course of their work, to take risks such as naval men seldom take in time of peace. Often enough fifty per cent. of them did not understand the language of the country they temporarily served; they owed no allegiance to the flag they sailed under. Many of them were completely ignorant of the terms of their employment. They had listened to a number of regulations gabbled hastily through by an incoherent shipping clerk, but the recital had conveyed no clear impression to their minds. They knew, however, that any dereliction of duty on their part could be punished by a nominal fine. Five shillings is a trifle to a man when he is about to draw a pay-day of perhaps thirty to forty pounds. They knew that open insubordination with violence could be met by confinement in irons, but this only as a last resort, because the ship was usually so scantily manned that

not a man could be spared from her complement if her safety were to be assured. The biggest deterrent to misbehaviour was that "Decline to report" entry in their discharge papers. But there were certain worthy citizens in every seaport who, for a consideration, could always supply a man with a fresh set of papers bearing the best of characters, and an assumed name to work under. The deck hands knew this, and so "Decline to report" lost much of its menace. They could, at a pinch, be hauled up before the British "Counsel" at whatever port they reached, and by that magnate sentenced to fine or imprisonment; but they also knew that desertion was an offence not only winked at, but even in some cases encouraged by parsimonious captains, for by deserting a man forfeited all his arrears of pay; and though the Board of Trade stepped in to claim such arrears, yet it was always possible so to fake the man's slop-chest accounts as to make it appear that most of the money was owing to the ship; and the captain, who ran the slop-chest, benefited accordingly.

There was no combined spirit of loyalty to employers amongst such men, no bond of an inspiring service which it were an honour to be a member of. Ashore they had no status of any kind whatsoever, and few friends. They were looked on as lawful victims of all harpies, crimps and thieves—fair game for spoliation.

"Only a drunken sailor!" How often one has heard that comment passed. Prejudged as Ishmaels, scant efforts were made, and those only by a devoted and insufficient few, to ameliorate their existence when on land; so that they had no choice really but to follow the muddy tide of recognised pleasure, so-called; to submit to the attentions of their parasites; to be drugged, robbed, and shanghaied. They had known nothing of comfort, of regularly constituted discipline in their youth. And these were the men

over whom a small body of other men, backed by no visible authority, had to rule in the face of all circumstances, whether fair or foul; these were the men who had to be sent to grapple with raw death, who had to fight tooth and nail, spent and sobbing, exerting the last ounces of their strength, for the welfare and safety of a ship that was nothing to them except a floating workhouse and a means of precarious existence. And when they had done it, when they had toiled, as shall be shown, for a matter of forty or fifty hours at a stretch, when they had failed to secure cooked food because it was impossible to keep a fire alight in a galley that was incessantly washed clean by cascading seas, when they had worked cargo under scorching tropical suns that would fell a negro with heat apoplexy, they were given—what? The bare wage they had earned, and nothing more. No concessions were made to them; they were turned adrift, to secure another ship if they could, to starve if they could not. And all they had to look forward to at the end was a grave, either at sea or near a workhouse, for the moment their capacity for work ceased, that moment their wages stopped. No pensions here to look forward to; the best they could expect was to die in harness, and thus be spared the slow torture of decrepit pauperdom. They might serve unknown owners with every ounce of their muscular fibre for the best part of their lives, but the owners held themselves to be under no obligation to them when age wore them down. How could they hope for more? The very state of their existences forbade the acquirement of seniority in any service. When they were paid off on the completion of a voyage they were done with; and it was not at all out of the common for a sailing ship, on paying off, to lie up for perhaps three clear months. And the fattest pay-day could not stand the strain of waiting such a length of time. Merchant Jack was perforce compelled to seek fresh employment in any

ship that offered. Ten to one such a ship belonged to an entirely different owner than the last.

And yet the discipline maintained amongst such a heterodox conglomeration of humanity was tight and strong, effective, as the splendid history of the mercantile marine has proved a thousand times.

For I count it good discipline that will compel men of these varying types to go in cold blood to the performance of almost superhuman tasks. I count it good discipline that will enable these men to wrestle with slatting canvas for hour after heart-breaking hour, joggling on a jerking yard, with an eighty-mile-an-hour blizzard blowing off the pitch of the Horn.

"They are fighting for their own lives," say the critics, who hold that discipline is non-existent in the merchant service. My experience is that in the vast majority of cases the old-time windjammer seaman was actuated only by the desire to bring his ship through her perils to safe haven. And if the critics could see these men, as I have seen them, wagering a month's pay on the result of an impromptu race between their own ship and a chance-met stranger, if they could see them move aft in a body and implore the captain to hang on to his canvas to the last stitch, as I have seen them, so that the stranger might be beaten and honour accrue to the ship, they would feel disposed to reconsider their judgments and give Merchant Jack the trivial honour that was his due.

But the accepted discipline, which consists in the main of cap-touching, salaaming, spick and span cleanliness, "eyewash" generally, was a thing beyond such men's ken; it meant nothing to them. Their discipline consisted in doing the work set to them, and applying to the doing certain powers of initiative which are somewhat unknown in other services. These windjammer sailors took the honest pride of craftsmen in their duties; they believed in

turning out a thoroughly workmanlike job of whatever they were set to do. Such scant leisure as was theirs they devoted to instructing apprentices in the whole and sole art of practical seamanship—tuition, this, which the owners guaranteed to give, but which they failed to make provision for giving. What little seamanship I acquired during sailing-ship days was not taught me by specially appointed officers, acting under instructions from the owners who had taken the responsibility on their shoulders by their written agreement. It was taught by fo'c'sle hands in their watch below, in the main, with no hope of reward, but simply from a sense of thoroughness and the liking to see youngsters trained into efficient seamen.

What, then, was the power which enabled the ordained officers set over such people to rule them in all circumstances? Personality, I suppose, and but little else. The personality of men who, they and their descendants, supplied something like fifteen thousand officers to the Royal Navy during the European War, who officered the thousand and one mosquito craft which undertook the work of mine-sweeping, submarine-hunting, "Q" boating, who carried the white ensign to the remotest seas of the world, and who, by their efforts, did as much as any men to bring victory to the cause of right. Men, too, who did even more than fight the Hun with modern weapons, in that they took their unarmed merchantmen through hideous danger zones, without pause or fear, and who filled Britain's storehouses to the full when a determined enemy had set out, aided by every ingenious resource the scientific mind could devise, to starve our land into miserable submission., For the sailing-ship officers of yesterday are the steamship officers of to-day, and there is no prouder history of any service in the war than that which is written indelibly in the annals of the mercantile marine.

CHAPTER II

ON OUR OWN

It was not until the Tasker Light was winking redly at us to starboard that the tug signalled its determination to have done with us, by strident hootings on its syren. The clamour reached our ears as we sat in the half-deck, and Crowther grunted.

"More blasted work!" said he, growling as usual. He was our prime grumbler, and the verdict passed upon him was that, though a young sailor, he was a first-class "old soldier." He disliked labour certainly; he had an eye for a soft job; and he was not above making up to the steward sycophantly for the sake of obtaining occasional delicacies by way of relief from the monotonous fare of deep water. "A head wind outward—enough to sicken any man," he added, reaching for a fistful of biscuit from the bread-barge, and cramming it into his pocket ere donning his oil-skins.

Sure enough, we had to face a dead muzzler on the first night of the voyage. The weather conditions were anything but promising; there was a moan and a whine in the air which presaged the coming of a full gale; but we who posed as being weatherwise took heart of grace, and said that the wind would shift to the nor'ard with the rising of the moon, and that meant a fair wind down Channel, the possibility of plenty of sea-room almost at once, and a truce to pully-hauls.

"Hands, make sail!" came the cry from the poop, close on the heels of the tug's signal. It was an all-hands job, of course, this first setting of our can-

vas; there was to be no thought of rest until the spars were clothed. We tumbled out, to be greeted by whirling sleet and the bite of the breeze, which was blowing freshly enough, and in the darkness began a hurried piece of work that would have impressed a landsman as being little short of miraculous.

Lower topsails had already been set by way of making the ship answer her helm better as she trudged in wake of the tug; but there were upper topsails to loose and hoist; the foresail was to be dropped, the spanker hauled out, certain head- and stay-sails were required, that the ship might be perfectly balanced when left to her own devices. The night was as dark as pitch; it was literally impossible, on first emerging on deck, to see one's hand before one's face; but we found our way about the too-familiar decks by instinct; and the forecastle crowd—by now more or less sober—very quickly got the hang of the ropes and their leads, for one ship is much like another in essentials, and practically all the deckhands were sailing-ship-trained men.

But the idea occurred to my mind that the deck itself on such an occasion as this might be too crowded with work and confusion for comfort, and it was an easy matter to nip up over the sheerpole and dance aloft. Someone else—Slumgullion, as it proved—was possessed of the same desire simultaneously; we raced to the maintop together, and arrived at the futtocks breathlessly.

"Out of old Pieface's way up here," coughed my pal, as we reached the bunt of the upper topsail yard. "He's like poison and peppermint to-night. I had the wheel, and she was sheering about a bit—phew! you ought to have heard the beggar! Got his liver well up under his armpit, I'll bet—so ware booze, dear lad!"

"Up aloft, there! Look alive with that topsail! Think we're going to wait all night for you ——?" The hoarse cry from the deck trickled away into in-

coherencies, and we laughed together. Unquestionably, the mate was in rather a worse temper than usual. He had to look forward to a long night out, for one thing; and we had noticed once or twice during the day that he had absented himself from the deck, to return exhaling a strong aroma of alcohol after each visit below. He preached a strenuous gospel of temperance to all and sundry, but he failed to practise his preachings. Evidently the stale liquor was annoying him, and:

"Hope to the Lord he doesn't choose me for the port watch," said my chum, as we laboured at the lee gaskets of the topsail. "Curse these patent riggers' stows! Old Mugwumps is out for blood this trip—disappointed at not getting command, I expect. When I'm mate I'll practise deportment in front of a mirror, and talk like those dockyard maties in 'Peter Simple,' wasn't it?"

"Worse things than being in the port watch," I reminded him, ere we swung over to windward. "Captain doesn't bother the mate much night-watches on deck—second greaser comes in for that. Too muchee pully-hauly under Massa Second Mate, sah!"

"If I come up to you aloft there, I'll make you move about a bit," sounded the threat from the deck, and we quickened our movements. We threw loose the gaskets, those small ropes that confine a furled sail to the yard, and we made them up in neat hanks, well knowing by past experience the value of such work. When you are fighting tooth and nail to control a slatting, wet and iron-hard sail some eighty feet in length, and twenty-five feet in the drop, you appreciate the excellence of having every gasket ready to your hand; and though we might not ourselves be called upon to furl that topsail the next time, yet there is a decided *esprit de corps* amongst sailing-ship men, which leads them to lighten one another's labours whensoever opportunity offers.

We scrambled in along the resilient footropes, our numbed and bleeding hands clinging with difficulty to the jackstays; and as we went in we cursed the work of those who had bent the sail without leaving sufficient slack to ensure a proper handhold, forgetting that we ourselves had done the work!

"All ready, main topsail!" I yelped into the gloomy void below.

"Right—let fall! Overhaul your gear, aloft there!" The diagonal sword-mat that served as a midship gasket was cast loose, and the great sodden sail dropped with a thud, until the wind caught it and set it a-frap with reckless motion. There was a grinding of sheaves as the hands below took in the slack of the halliards; the parral creaked vigorously. We lads stationed ourselves in the topmast rigging, one on either side, lighting up the slack of the buntlines, as the stout ropes that are rove though the foot of the sail in order to haul up the slack when furling are called, that the labours of those on deck might be eased.

"Good egg!" shouted Slumgullion. "There's a decent chantyman aboard." And his words reached my ears through the deep baritone of a sailorman's voice, a heartening, even a thrilling sound when at sea, with a breeze blowing and the whitecaps breaking everywhere about.

Chantying is fast becoming a lost art in these days of steam and internal combustion. Only here and there does it survive, to bring back to mind ancient memories and some tinge of romance to the average greyness of a life afloat. But in the days of which I write it was in its zenith, almost; to possess a voice and a stock of chantys made a man at once something of a leader amongst his kind. For the chanty lightened labour amazingly; it set embittered men a-laughing on occasion, it welded the crew together in common effort, it served as a means of

administering reproof to the after-guard. If you started a chanty on the topgallant halliards, say, during a Sunday morning "sweating-up," you indicated to the officer of the watch that you considered you were being required to depart from the exact accuracy of that Sunday entry in every sailing ship's log: "This day being the Sabbath, no unnecessary work was done." Many and many a time have I seen a ship's company, worked to the extent of its strength, disheartened by incessant battling with a merciless enemy that utterly lacks any sense of sportsmanship, drooping and faint of heart, quicken to vigour and resolution as the heartening gust of a deep-water chanty roared out amid the scream and yelp of a Cape Horn snorter. No doubt about it, a well-sung chanty is as good as an extra couple of hands on a rope.

But as the youth of to-day will hardly come much in contact with this phase of an older service, it may be permissible here to explain precisely what a chanty is.

Be it known, then, that on certain occasions on shipboard, and particularly so aboard windjammers, concerted effort, when all hands must pull like one man, is not infrequently required. In the Navy such concerted action is obtained by some petty officer or leading hand controlling the operation, shouting, "One, two, three, heave!" or something to that effect. The merchant service cared nothing for such aids to harmonious labour; it preferred to go its own way, deeming it the best. And it was right. It gathered together an enormous collection of the weirdest kind of song, and it passed this collection down from generation to generation. Most of the chanties were culled from Yankee sources during the day of the Yankee merchant service's prime, when the famous clippers ruled the seas. An analysis of these hauling songs shows a very predominant American tendency, and there is, too, a strong plantation strain amongst

them. But whatever their origin, whatever their history through the shipping years, of their efficacy there can be no smallest doubt. They were designed to help men to pull, and they did help; and we youngsters hailed with delight the presence aboard of a competent chantyman.

"You've heard of Reuben Renzo," came the deep-chested solo from below, and on its heels the growing chorus:

"Renzo, boys, Renzo!"

"You've heard of Reuben Renzo," came the solo again, and the chorus thundered: "Renzo, boys, Renzo" vigorously. And though the hands below remained inactive during the singing of the solo line, in the chorus, at each repetition of the word "Renzo," they laid back heartily on the halliards, so that the topsail yard went up as if it were alive and eager to reach the masthead. It was good to hear the song and to follow the adventures of that mythical "Renzo," who started life as a New York tailor, and concluded his career by becoming captain of a New Bedford whaler, after being taught navigation and marrying the captain's daughter.

And it was good, too, to stand aloft there in the rigging, leisurely lighting up the buntlines, and knowing that other men below were pulling their arms half out of their sockets whilst we were taking it easy. We felt, in a way, that we were getting back a bit at those owners who had defrauded us of our rights.

"Not so bad, is it?" clamoured Slumgullion, and the sound of his full-lunged sniffing of the keen salt air reached me through the whimper of the wind and the frap-frap of multifarious ropes.

No, it was not so bad. In very many ways it was very good indeed. Up aloft here it was possible to find beauty in the dim-seen picture the ship presented. Our eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and many things hitherto invisible were plainly

to be discerned. There was a confused run of phosphorescent whiteness over the sullen blackness of the sea; astern of the ship stretched a long silvery trail like that of a steamer. White water broke from her bows as she towed full into the run of the sea; it was possible to distinguish, with much eye-straining, the sturdy swing and tread of the tug ahead, to see the thin white line of the hawser as it dipped and emerged. There was the steady white glimmer of the pilot light on the tug's mainmast, set there for our own helmsman to steer by; in even succession foaming wave-crests ran towards the little steamer, and the vague whiteness grew tinged with red and green as the side lights shot down fitful gleams. And ahead of us was the vague, black tracery of spars and rigging, the trucks already swinging slowly across the sky, where dark storm clouds lowered threateningly, save at one point where a patch of clearness showed dark purple shot with tiny points of throbbing fire.

"It's blowing up," shouted Slumgullion. "Bet we're shipping it green by daylight. Who cares?"

But hoisting a topsail does not last for ever; the chanty below ceased, we heard the last line clearly, hinting that the men were getting fed up with pully-hauls. Nothing a sailor hates more than "dry pulls," which do nothing save gratify the mate's desire to keep the crew hard at it.

"I thought I heard the chief mate say," bellowed the chantyman, and the chorus boomed on: "Renzo, boys, Renzo."

"Give one more pull and then belay," came the hint; and before the chorus was at it:

"Belay main topsail halliards! Take a pull on the weather brace. Up aloft!"

"Sir?"

"Stop up your gear and come down—look alive!" There was the surge of the parral as they hung off and belayed the rope below; Slumgullion and I

clawed out on either yard. We had already supplied ourselves with lengths of sailmaker's twine—what apprentice but carries fathoms of the stuff in every pocket; for he knows that at any moment of day or night he might be ordered aloft to "overhaul the gear"? And we dragged a little slack on the buntlines up through their fairleads and the blocks stropped to the jackstays; we caught a turn with the twine round rope and iron, allowing a slack bight to hang at the sail's foot, so that the canvas might not be chafed through. But we were trained sailors enough to do the job properly, too—no ropeyarn stops this journey. Such devices might be all right when you were down in the Trades, in fine weather, when mate and second mate liked nothing better than to roam along the decks just before daylight, tugging at all buntlines and suchlike stuff in order to break the stops and so have an excuse to send the gentlemen rope-haulers aloft before proper turn—to just to remind them that they weren't passengers. But with hard weather promising twine was the stuff, so that a stiff jerk from below would part it and permit the buntline to run clear; no having to scurry aloft as fast as you could go when the "Stand by topsail halliards" cry went out. And when you reached the yard, to find that after all your sheath-knife had been left on the tobacco board on the half-deck table, and that you simply couldn't tear the ropeyarn stop apart; whilst the skipper was cursing the whole breed of apprentices from the poop, and the men were cursing the ——— who had played the fool, and the sail was slatting and thundering and threatening to carry bodily away! No, we weren't having any of that, thanks! A single turn of twine would hold the ropes slack, it would part when pulled, and the ropeyarns could wait for another occasion.

The mention of overhauling gear reminds me of an occurrence that might be intruded here. It was "Ginger" who played the principal rôle. He was

a lad who had undoubtedly been sent to sea to be got rid of. There can be no doubt of that: he was due to inherit certain large sums of money under his grandfather's will when he came of age; his father was dead, and he had relatives. I don't suppose for a moment that the thought of murder entered their minds at all; but accidents do happen at sea! There certainly could not have been any other reason for his taking service under the red duster, for he loathed the life, and he was the unhandiest man aboard a ship that I have ever seen. He could do nothing right; he appeared to be possessor of two left hands and ten thumbs. He could hardly keep his feet on deck, even when the ship was in port, if the planking was wet; and whenever his feet deserted him, which was often, his head inevitably encountered a stanchion or a ring-bolt painfully. If he had to paint anything he applied more paint to himself than to the object; and he spilt a lot about the shipscape generally. He was seasick every time it blew more than a topgallant breeze, and always so on leaving port. In appearance he was long and ragged about the angles; he boasted a shock of violently red hair; he owned to a slack mouth, and his intelligence was below the average, although he certainly possessed the instincts of good breeding; and he would gladly write home for money at anyone's bidding, and divide the result amongst the lot of us without a moment's hesitation.

Ginger was sent aloft to overhaul the royal buntlines on the main. It was a day of mixed calms and fitful airs in the tropics; the canvas slatted heavily against the masts. Close-hauled, when a breeze did come, the ship was kept by the wind; that is, the weather leech of the royal was just permitted to shake. Ginger equipped himself with twine—and got it into a tangle before he left the deck! That was just what he would do, of course. Then he clambered awkwardly aloft. No one paid much attention to him; all the watch on deck were actively

employed, and we were never encouraged to waste our time in staring about. And it was not until the man at the wheel let out a shout that the captain, who was on the poop, saw what was happening. Ginger had funk'd the greasy scramble up the chain royal halliards that was necessary to overhaul the tightened buntlines through the lead-blocks. He had stopped at the eyes of the topgallant rigging, beyond which no ratlines ran. There was no further aid to climbing before him beyond the much-slushed chain and the straight, smooth pole of the royal-mast. When the helmsman shouted he was walking out on the upper topgallant yard, standing quite erect and holding on to the foot of the sail above him; and that sail was flapping like a handkerchief! He was something like a hundred and fifty feet above the deck; if in falling he had missed the ship, there were three sharks' fins showing overside.

"Hard up!" roared the skipper to the helmsman. "Keep her romping full." It was done; but the sail flapped heavily and we—turning our eyes instinctively aloft as sailors invariably do when any unusual shout is heard—saw Ginger stagger, balance wildly with arms outstretched, then make a frantic grab at the sail's foot again, and—catch it. I remember my heart slogged at my ribs like a steam-hammer at the sight! Is it surprising?

The skipper said such things as seemed appropriate; but he did not let out his voice to its fullest extent, for fear of startling Ginger and causing him to let go his hold. He merely ordered him down from aloft and called him aft. Not until our shipmate was there before him did he let go with his vocal broadside, but when he did it was a revelation of the fear he had known. He informed Ginger that he had just had the narrowest escape from death that any man could have and go on living. He assured him that he would be dumped out of the average ship if he had been shipped merely as ballast—he declared

him to be the most left-handed — — that ever donned a seaboot. Then he asked why the this, that and the other, he had been such a fool.

Ginger smiled into his face with the innocent candour of a cherubim.

"I thought it would be easier to get hold of that rope-thing from below, sir," he said. "I'm tall, and I thought I could reach up."

We boys said afterwards that the second mate was in the plot to get rid of Ginger; we held that he had been bribed to send him into danger; we even urged that he had advised Ginger to do precisely what he had done. Poor Ginger! He was everlastingly in trouble: one of those unfortunates who invariably got "the thick end of the stick to hold." He could do nothing right, try as he might; and when he went ashore at a certain South American port which had best be nameless, he, an innocent spectator of a bit of a riot amongst the labourers, was promptly felled by a blow from the butt of a *vigilante's* rifle! Others, murderers potentially, escaped scot-free. And his unconscious body was haled to the calaboose; and next morning Ginger, heir to a fortune which we boys variously estimated at from one hundred thousand to several million pounds, was set to work to sweep the public streets of the city and to perform jobs of an even more degrading character, until the skipper and the British Consul discovered what was toward and bailed him out of limbo.

He was the ship's clown—an unconscious one. But he was a good lad, slow of speech, lymphatic of action—and utterly incapable of playing a dirty trick on a living soul. Intellectually dull, his code of honour was bright and shining as a medieval knight's shield; and we others, more careless perhaps, who permitted ourselves in some degree to be brutalised by our surroundings, learnt many a good lesson from him—particularly in our attitude towards women and the decencies of life. . . .

But here is the ship setting plain sail, here is the tug fussily demanding its freedom, for her crew have no desire to withstand the coming gale when they can run to port for shelter; and Ginger and his varied fortunes must be relegated to another place.

The fore upper topsail was set as the main had been; we two, Slumgullion and myself, putting off as much time as we could aloft prior to descending to engage in the muling work on deck. But we were discovered at our scrimshanking and choked off pretty severely; and during the rest of the time a close eye was kept on us.

Assuredly loafing, or even its similitude, was not encouraged aboard the packet that we honoured by our presence aboard. And especially were the unfortunate boys kept at it: night and day, Sunday and Saturday; it made no difference. The ship's officers knew they had us safely: the fore-castle hands could desert on reaching port, if they were dissatisfied; but we boys—we were working to fit ourselves for a life's career; and the question of our being eligible to sit for second mate's examination rested not so much on our ability as seamen and navigators: all the essentials in these directions could be acquired by a month's hard grinding in a navigation school ashore; but on the captain's and owners' good word as expressed in our testimonials when our time was served and we were free to leave the ship. That threat of a bad reference is a useful weapon in a ship-master's hands; it succeeds where threats of mere personal violence fail.

So we pattered about the littered decks; we "got beforehand" on the ropes to show our willingness; we were here, there and everywhere all at once; and I say without undue boasting that it was due in the main to the boys' efforts that the muslin was flung to the wind, and the ship permitted to trust to her own devices.

"Maintopsail to the mast!" was now the com-

mand, and we braced the mainyard aback. The pilot was leaving, and by his going we were to sever our last connecting link with shore assistance. The tug had stopped her engines and was already ranging alongside, men groping overboard to keep the hawser clear of the propeller; the port watch were on the forecastle head hauling in the slack of that mighty rope which would not again be required until three or four months were gone and some twelve thousand watery miles lay behind us.

"Is there time to write a letter? I promised that girl at — I'd write," said Slumgullion. We all remembered letters that we should have written; but alas! the pages of our writing blocks were virgin in their whiteness. But one or two of us contrived to scramble below and scrawl hasty last messages; though but few pens were forthcoming, and most of the ink-bottles were empty as a result of our last rough house.

"There was much similarity in these missives, such as were written by us older hands, that is.

"MY DEAR FATHER,—The pilot is just leaving; there is no time to write. Expect we shall have a pleasant voyage; please send some money to be waiting on arrival. Love to all at home."

They were not what those at home looked and longed for perhaps; but hang it! we should have lots of time to write regular screeds during the coming passage; and what was there to write about aboard ship, anyhow?

But the youngsters, the first-voyagers, did better. And one of them, poor lad, did more than merely write: he watered his pages with salty tears. I was sorry for the lad; he was weakly, had been the object of a doting mother's affection all his days; he had never been to school, but had been entrusted to the scholarly care of the village parson, who took an

interest in tutoring work; he had never been called on to fasten his own trousers at the back, to all intents and purposes; and here he was in a new, unsympathetic, brutal world, where the men about him embroidered every speech with oaths as lurid as those of the fabled "pard"; seasickness was already threatening; loneliness assailed him; life's reality had taken remorseless seizin upon him; and he felt that not a living soul cared a hang whether he lived or died. Not an enviable frame of mind to be in; we oldsters had experienced it in some degree, but we affected to be superior to such human weaknesses, and besought him to stop his snivelling, and try to be a man.

The tug was blowing frantically as we scribbled, disturbing our thoughts.

"The pilot won't go without another drink, and there'll be the tobacco to parcel up," we said, and tried to think of comfortably situated relatives who might prove susceptible to a well-written appeal.

"I'm touching that old uncle of mine," Crowther said, licking an envelope flap with a long wet tongue. "He's wallowing in oof, the old miser; and I'll try the old tune on him for what it's worth. An extra fiver out Sydney way wouldn't do anybody any harm."

"Sting your mater for a bit extra, if she's so keen on you, Bubbles," said one of us to the first-voyager. Already we had come to call him "Bubbles," because of curly golden hair and a suggestion of moisture about mouth, nose and eyes. "Nothing like tapping 'em when they're tender—she'll get your letter just when she's feeling most weepy, and she'll spring a solid chunk of oof before she has time to think. And oof is a good thing in Sydney, or any other place for the matter of that."

Bubbles wrote obediently, and we tasted the worth of that appeal when we arrived at our port. For we had a custom aboard our ship that everything in the

half-deck was common property, excepting only seaboots and oilskins, which were sacred to the individual. Everything else was a common fund, and I have seen us, on rejoining, or arriving at a port abroad, turn all the cash we had with us or received on to the table, in order that all might share. Our sea-chests were never locked—the turning of a key was looked on as an insult to our fellow-apprentices, and youngsters who failed to appreciate our communistic ideas and who insisted on locking up their property were quickly brought to heel by having their sea-chests forced open with the first marline-spike that came handy.

“And have you shaken your Bible, Bubbles?” Slumgullion asked, biting at his pen as he sought for fit expressions of tenderness for the girl he had left behind him. “What’s the right thing to tell a girl when you mightn’t see her for a couple of years?” he asked me. “Hang it! what’s the good? She’ll be fooling around with someone else by now; and there’s that Madge Sterritt in Sydney—be blowed if I write at all.” And he tore his half-written letter to pieces with utter deliberation.

“Shaken my Bible?” asked Tomlinson, bewildered. His brain at this stage worked slowly; and Slumgullion’s remarks anent his various flames had passed him unnoticed.

“Why, of course. Didn’t you ever hear the story of the apprentice who was given a beautiful Bible and who promised to read it every day, and when he got home his father opened it, and there was a five-pound note between the leaves? Always shake your Bible at the beginning, my son—it saves trouble,” concluded the young heathen; but his advice fell on deaf ears so far as the first-voyager was concerned: Bubbles was sniffing suspiciously, and paying much attention to the crossing of his “t’s” and the dotting of his “i’s.”

I think I knew why. It is the suggestion of

homely things that catches at the heart-strings most : Bubbles was remembering quiet, peaceful evenings by his mother's drawing-room fire, when the Book was taken from its place and opened according to long-established custom ; when the soft, loving voice read out some well-chosen passage, and well-being and harmony and love closed round as with a hallowed benediction.

"Snivelling young swab !" said Crowther.

"I'll snivel you !" Slumgullion was on his feet and making headlong towards his fellow second-voyager, intent on administering punishment, when from the deck came the cry of "All ha-a-nds !" and out we had to go perforce. The pilot was leaving ; the tug lay alongside, heaving and creaking and thudding as the big cork fenders took her weight. Her steaming lights shone brightly, and made the darkness doubly dark by contrast ; there was a suggestion of warmth and cheer in her lighted skylights, and in the savoury odours that came from her galley funnel. There was not one of us lads, I ween, who would not gladly have changed places with the lowliest trimmer aboard that tug, though we affected in the main to "think contemptuous" of steamboat men, as Mulvaney did of elephants ! We had exaggerated ideas of the feeding and comfort that ruled aboard the Liverpool tugs ; our previous cook had served in one, and used to savour our tasteless diet with red-hot accounts of the meals he served for his ship's fore-castle hands. And to hungry boys of our age food was a matter of primary consideration : our biggest ideals, I think, were merged in thoughts of big square meals eaten in decent surroundings to the accompaniment of rattling music.

There came from the tug, as we waited for the pilot to make his adieus to the afterguard, sounds of trouble ; her mate appeared in the loom of our gang-way light, dragging a dishevelled wreck of humanity by the tattered collar.

"One o' your boys trying a pier-head jump, Cap'n," he said, and haled the man over our rail and flung him on deck with no particular gentleness.

"Well, I'll be off—good-bye, Cap'n, pleasant voyage," said the pilot hurriedly, as though undesirous of witnessing a scene of violence. "Any more letters?" We crowded about him, thrusting our last offerings upon him, apologising for lack of stamps—he grinned cheerfully round on us, then sprang lightly over the rail.

"Cast off, there!" We dropped the mooring lines overboard, the tug frothed away.

"Port main braces—with a will, my sons!" We tailed on to the braces, with a yo-heave-ho; someone sang out cheerily; the yards came rattling round; the canvas filled with a shudder that grew into a roar of sound; the ship careened to the thrusting wind, and a curl of white water ran from her bow and whisked high above the fore brace-blocks.

"By the wind!" sang out the skipper; and from aft came the chanted answer:

"By the wind, sir!" We were off on our own at last; at the mercy of every gale that blew and every sea that roared. But we had a stout ship beneath us, and though our skipper was a bit of a driver, we trusted his seamanship. What did it matter, anyhow—the longer the trip the better, so that our time would be put in with fewer "holidays."

As I went on the poop to coil down the main top-gallant braces, I heard the captain say to the mate:

"We never searched for stowaways, mister."

"And it's too late now, sir," said the mate, cheerfully. He had been invited below to share a parting glass with the pilot; his humour was good. "All the better if we find one or two—we're not too heavily manned, as things go. An extra hand a watch would be a godsend, and I reckon I'd make sailors out of gardeners before we sight Cape Leewin." . . .

"Lay aft, all hands! All hands aft!" The word was passed, and aft we trooped, to huddle up in the usual chaotic crowd that sailormen affect when they are together. It wasn't the "old man's" custom to commence the voyage with a speech—such a custom prevails aboard but few merchant ships; though in men-of-war it is, I believe, different. With us there was never any suggestion of even pretended friendship between the officers and the hands; the men were there to work, and the afterguard were there to make them work, and there you had it. No sharing of perils and discomforts in common seemed to bind any bonds between forward and aft; the attitude of the fo'c'sle was that of veiled hostility; that of the cabin crowd of severe authority at practically all times. The second mate alone condescended, on occasion, to unbend a little with old sailors; but then the second mate was only an amateur officer at best—a novice at his trade, just newly out of the half-deck, with the ink scarcely dry on his certificate of competency. And on this night our skipper did not depart from his custom. But as it was first night out he celebrated the occasion in a manner to appeal to the sailorman's heart:

"Grog-ho!" he said; and grog-ho it was. We had had a strenuous day, and we were wet through; so a tot of spirits was handed out to all who cared to have it; though without the usual ceremony that holds aboard His Majesty's ships at such a sacred function. There the daily issue of grog is a hallowed rite: formalities are gone through; one can almost savour burning incense and chanted prayers. With us—no. The steward stood in the companionway with a whisky bottle in hand, and a tumbler. He canted out a measure and passed it to the first man who filed past; it was drunk off, the man wiped his mouth and passed on, until all who desired it had been served. But that timely draught altered the whole tone of conversation in the waist.

"Not such a bad packet—grog first night out!"

"I've sailed in ships where you didn't get the sniff of a cork; no, not even off old Cape Stiff, in August."

"Can't be much wrong with a hooker that gives grog." There were as many words of praise now as had been words of blame a little while before: grog is a great healer of maritime woes.

"Pick watches," was now the order; and this was done without loss of time. There was not much light, but the gangway lantern served to illuminate the faces of the crew; all hands were mustered aft at the poop break. They were a rough-looking crowd enough: unshaven, dishevelled, many of them with damaged eyes and noses; but there was nothing scoundrelly about them; once the effects of their shore-going were worn off they would be decent, honest workmen; not particularly brilliant intellectually, maybe, but sailormen, able to hand, reef and steer, and to risk their lives in a dozen different fashions for the safety of a ship that, technically, was no more to them than is a factory ashore to a weaver employed therein. And their attire was startling and wonderful; some wore oilskins, some wore only thin, well-washed and better-patched dungarees. One man wore a battered bowler on his head, another a piratical stocking cap of flaming red; and they stood with half-closed hands, as though still gripping a rope, not displaying much interest in the ceremony, except to hope they would be chosen for the mate's or port watch, because the starboard watch, as is the unwritten law of the sea in windjammers, always drops in for the dirty work if the ship is a mate's ship, as ours was.

The mate had first choice; he singled out a capable-looking, wiry Englishman, who claimed to be a Manxman, though his name was decidedly Welsh. But he was a proper shellback, a heart-strand of the *Bellerophon's* mainstay; every hair of

his head a ropeyarn, every drop of his blood good Stockholm tar, as the saying goes; the sort of man—you could see it written all over him—to be first aloft on a blustering night and last down; the man to understand a ship's whimsies when the big seas were running to the height of the main yardarm; a clever sailmaker, skilled in mat-making, square-sennit-making, in needle whippings and cross-pointing; in a word, a better-type British merchant seaman, able to do anything aboard ship, from cooking the lobsouse to taking charge of a watch if the need arose; a man who could spend a year's payday in a couple of nights ashore; but one who would esteem it a deadly sin to keep a dirty shirt in his bag so long as a drop of fresh water could be got by fair means or foul; the sort of man who first answers the call for volunteers when rescue-work is to be done; the sort of man, if you must have it, who kept on keeping on during the war though ship after ship was torpedoed beneath him; and who, because the Empire knows not the worth of its servants, would probably die in a workhouse or a lock hospital if the sea spared him in the end.

They tell me to-day that Rhys—such was his name—has ceased to exist as a breed; that steam has killed him; but, six months ago, in a sailing “Q” boat, I came across his image; only, to all other accomplishments, he had added the art of gunnery, and a cold-blooded, blasphemous hatred of anything German that was only Rhys's instinctive hatred of “squareheads” quickened by experience.

Rhys stepped over to the port side, and the second mate chose—a big beefy Norwegian, who looked capable of lifting the windlass from its bed and juggling with it. Next to real Britishers, the Norwegians are far away the best sailormen working under the red ensign; they can be relied on in emergency, and they work hard when weather conditions are good; they are, too, soberer and better conducted generally when

ashore than some Britishers. But it means bad blood and a general atmosphere of strife aboard ship when she carries both Norwegians and Swedes in her crew—as there exists an age-old antagonism between the two races that foments unpleasantness.

The mate's next choice was a Russian Finn; a man who signed on without understanding a single word of English, but who looked what he was—a capable seaman. Frederiksen by name, a sort of rough and ready friendship sprung up between this man and myself; we conversed in the *lingua franca* of the sea, which everyone understands, and we made a pact: that he should teach me Finnish whilst I taught him my mother-tongue. At the end of a three-and-a-half months' passage he spoke English fluently, and I could just manage to box the compass in Finnish! But as I tried to explain: anyone who has been brought up on such a tongue-twisting lingo as that spoken in Finland, ought to find any other language child's play in the learning. Frederiksen was a big simple-hearted child; a glutton for work, and utterly fearless when aloft; he answered to the immediate nickname of "Dobbra," which was bestowed upon him by the mate, and which was fondly supposed by that autocrat to be "Dobroff," Russian for "Good." And not only could he do seamanship cunningly; he was exceedingly handy with carpenter's tools, could make sea-boots as soft as doeskin, make oilskins that resisted the heaviest tropical downpour, and was something of an artist as well. When the carpenter deserted at our first port on account of a girl he got tied up with, Dobroff took on his duties, and fitted himself out with a complete chestful of tools without expending any money at all—simply utilising materials that came to his hand amongst the lumber of shipboard; and his first real job of work was to put a new bow on the dinghy, as that useful craft had been crushed by getting between the ship and the wharf. And the dinghy was a better boat when

he had finished than it was before the accident happened!

In ancient seafaring days it was counted the extreme of ill-fortune to number a Finn amongst a ship's company; men of this race came into the same catalogue of superstitions as sailing on Friday, carrying parsons, shooting albatrosses and the like; but in the days of which I speak, this particular superstition was forgotten, and numberless Finns sailed steadily under the red ensign. Sometimes they were subject to Cape Horn fever, whose other name is chronic indisposition to work when trouble is brewing; but, in the main, they were useful men in a day when to get Britishers was wellnigh impossible, on account of the miserable wages paid by shipowners. Too, mates of the "bucko" breed liked them for the reason that they could be bullied, hazed, and generally maltreated without any fear of reprisal. And as very many of these people had served their apprenticeship to the sea in the old "hard-case" Yankee ships, they were used to be civil and even servile, and never gave trouble, except when in drink.

But more of Frederiksen and his fo'c'sle mates anon. One by one the men were picked and stepped over to their respective sides of the ship: the mate's, or port watch to port, the second mate's to starboard. We apprentices were chosen last, Slumgullion and myself falling to the second mate, together with Ginger; Crowther and the others going to the mate. I myself was senior apprentice of the ship: a position supposed to carry responsibility; but—it was only the responsibility of an extra couple of months or so in age. It meant, actually, that I was blamed for most things done by my juniors, and refused support in taking any disciplinary action.

CHAPTER III

A NEAR THING

"CALASHEE watches," said the mate, when all hands were chosen, down to the cook, carpenter, and steward—for even the so-called "day men" of a ship must be prepared to perform sailorising work on occasion aboard a windjammer. Always, in tacking ship, the cook and steward handle the foresheet; and always, when it's an all hands job aloft, the carpenter goes up too.

Now, the expression, "Calashee watches," deserves some explanation. The actual word is presumably Hindustanee, and dates back to the times when lascar labour was first employed in British ships. Lascars did not work quite as white men worked at sea; when work was to be done all hands did it; when it was completed, all hands rested, with scouts thrown out to convey a warning when the crew were again in demand. Similarly, a sailing ship, being notoriously undermanned, being quite unmanageable in any kind of heavy weather by an attenuated watch alone, was compelled to resort to this same practice. When the ship was to be tacked or wore, it meant that both watches were necessary; when a big sail was to be handled in a big squall, all hands were requisitioned. But as, in working down oceanward through narrow and somewhat dangerous waters, with a dead muzzler of a breeze blowing, it would be necessary to requisition the services of the entire crew perhaps three or four times in every four hours, it stands to reason that to attempt to carry on the regular watch-and-watch procedure would be

ridiculous. Therefore, the decree went forth that all hands should go below until they were actually required, and obtain such snatches of rest as they might, with one man constantly on the lookout to give the sleepers a call; but that, at the instant of "Tack ship!" being cried, everyone must be out like lightning and at his appointed post: the port watch at the head sheets and forebraces, the starboard watch at the main braces and the spanker-boom sheet.

Thus, the cluster of men aft broke up and drifted away forward, dodging the whipping sprays as they went; and we apprentices tore into the half-deck for a brief spell of leisure. Not all of us, however; it was an order that at least one of our number should supply a lee lookout on the poop—"keeping time," as we called it; striking the bells as the half-hours passed, and constantly ready to pass any order along. We seniors, being qualified to take regular wheels and lookouts, were supposed to be immune from this service; but, so far as the starboard watch was concerned, there were difficulties, spite of Ginger's good-humoured readiness to keep all the time required. Ginger was a junior, not to be trusted either at the wheel or on the lookout; but he was the only junior—in our watch, at least. But as Slumgullion said: "It would be confounded hard cheese for the poor devil to have to keep *all* the time"; and we had to evolve a working plan that would not oppress him unduly. You see, the watch on deck at night, in fine weather, is not so exacting in a windjammer as it is, say, in a tramp steamer with only three hands in a watch. When actual work on the braces is not demanded, or when a man is not employed serving his trick at the wheel or on the lookout, he is more or less at liberty to coil himself down in a corner and have a snooze—always providing he is available for duty when required. And, as I propose to tell later, a man can, on occasion, work in a complete night's sleep from eight p.m. to seven-twenty a.m. next morning,

providing the middle watch is his "farmer." But these explanations promise to become too cryptic, and must be worked up to by degrees, just as learning the compass is worked up to.

Meantime our debate concerned the possibility of getting Ginger a certain spell of leisure. We two second voyagers had been first-voyagers a little while before, and we had looked forward with eager anticipation to our senior standing, as entitling us to these little privileges previously denied to us. Yet here we were landed with only one junior in our watch. So we had so to arrange matters that we two split up the four hours' time-keeping on the poop with Ginger; and this we did in a somewhat complicated fashion, and remorsefully said "Good-bye" to all our hopes of a "farmer" watch on deck. And by "farmer" is meant a watch in which the man concerned has neither wheel nor lookout to take, and is free to disport himself as he desires.

But the best-laid schemes, etc. . . . Ginger was told off to keep the first two hours' time on the poop, and muffled himself in oilskins, heavy leather sea-boots with soles like polished glass, thick neck-wraps and mitts, and stumbled out into the pitch-black, rain-filled night. The ship lurched a bit as he stepped on deck; his feet shot from under him, and he slid like a bundle of rags to the well-filled scuppers, allowing the half-deck door to swing wide open, and thus bringing a bitter reprimand from skipper and second mate, at the blinding blaze of light which promptly dazzled them.

"Anyone that built a ship with the half-deck door facing aft is a swine!" we agreed, our ears tingling.

Ginger, undeterred by his fall—one of a hundred during the day—went to the poop and commenced tramping vigorously. Presently he was promptly checked for making a noise over the skipper's head and ordered to the other side. The mate—aroused in his turn—appeared wrathfully and wanted his head

on a charger; Ginger removed himself amidships, where he got into the second mate's way. After much abuse, feeling much like a dog with a tin can tied to its tail, he found a place where he would disturb no one: inside the companionway leading down to the saloon. Here, leaning against the jamb of the chart-room door, he peacefully went to sleep, and forgot to strike the bells; he was not available to pass the word instantler; and we other lads in the half-deck were not called when the ship was put about. There was trouble inevitably; all the apprentices of a watch were ordered to remain on deck during that watch; and Ginger, relieved from responsibility, once more coiled down to sleep the sleep of the pure in heart: this time at the bottom of the companion ladder. Here he was tripped over by the captain's daughter, coming on deck for a breath of air before turning in; and she promptly made him hot tea and served it with her own fair hands! So that Ginger seems to have come off best of any.

It was anything but pleasant on deck now, and our souls—Slumgullion's and mine—hungered for the comparative comfort of the half-deck. There, at least, was the stuffy warmth engendered by much close-packed humanity; there was light and a chance of coiling down for a restless rest on the sea-chests; at the worst, the opportunity for swapping those interminable yarns which go so far to make the unvaried life of shipboard bearable.

We said certain things about Ginger that would have made him blush to the small of his back had he heard them; we paced miserably up and down, athwartships, forward of the after hatch, tantalising ourselves with the faint glow of light that showed from the half-deck ports. And we yarned—chiefly about women, for we had emerged from the adolescent stage and were of inquiring dispositions.

We had been thrown into the seething cauldron of life as it is lived in the ports of all the world, with-

out a single word of warning as to what dangers we might encounter, what temptations we had to face. And the blood of our hot youth ran redly in our veins. We were conscious—ashamedly conscious—of growing curiosity and of the far-off stirrings of desire. But—saving grace!—we were both of us something of idealists, the Lord be praised! Women were to us immaculate beings set high on dizzy pinacles; to be worthy of their regard men must, we held, live cleanly, according to the standards set by our favourite writers of fiction. And as boyish heart communed with boyish heart, the barriers of reserve that hem youth in so closely began to totter and fall.

“From what I can see of it,” Slumgullion said, “this running after women is beastly. I’m keeping clear of it myself. Besides, there was a girl I met this time at home—rather a decent sort, though she would always shout: ‘Light the binnacle!’ after me. If I could get command when I’m about twenty-four or five I wouldn’t mind marrying her, if she’d have me. A ripping girl she was. She”—even in the whirling darkness it was possible to sense his bashful confusion—“she promised she’d write to me. I’ll tell you what—you remember that time ashore last voyage in Iquique, before we went to Lobos Islands?”

Memory flung me back to the dusty, odoriferous streets of the west coast town, with the jangling of the tramcar mule-bells, the cries of the drivers, the redolence of garlic and the sea; and I felt the crimson rushing to my face. Slumgullion and myself had obeyed the biddings of curiosity to a certain extent, and had journeyed to a street of no repute, where pitiful painted women strummed on tuneless guitars and made shameless invitation after the fashion of their kind. Oh, it was certainly the right thing to do: to “run the rag down”; and who were we that we should hold aloof from the recreations of our kind? But—we had thought to see Vice clad in gossamer garments of enchantment, full of seduction and allure;

and we sighted nothing but repulsiveness, sacred temples ruthlessly overcast and lying in hideous ruin, and some æsthetic streak in our natures sent us swiftly to places of less obvious disgust. I do not say we fought a moral battle; we were not conscious of moral scruples at all; but our fastidiousness was up in arms, and we escaped the sear of the branding iron. Let it pass at that; in a world too full of sickening analysis of the human soul in its deepest degradation, there is no need to pile slime on garbage.

"I thought we'd decided to say nothing about that Sunday," I protested.

"I know—but what I'm driving at is this: When I met this girl at home, I was no end glad we cleared out of —— Street that day. Can you get me?"

Now, in my own town was a girl—may the Peace be upon her wherever she sojourns now!—who was to my boyish fancy what the Holy Grail was to King Arthur's knights: something mystic, unapproachable, wonderful; to be worshipped with catching breath from afar. And I understood what Slumgullion was driving at more than passing well. There and then, with the chill Channel rain driving down our oilskin collars, with the bitter drive of the freshening gale whirling the bashfully spoken words from our lips, we made a pact, and we were faithful.

"I wouldn't like to think that any girl was ever the worse for knowing me," was the burden of that pact; and—it was kept.

"If we'd carried on that day," I remarked later, "we might have been where Johnson is now." Was it the fear of punishment that haltered our errant feet? Was it the latent original good that is as surely present in every man's ego as is original sin, though the pessimists deny it? I do not pretend to analyse. But we sank our voices at mention of Johnson's name, and the shudders that shook me, for my own part, were not due in their entirety to bite of wind and lashing rain. Poor Johnson! There

had been no deterrent in his case—rather he had walked of set intent into the pit dug for his destruction. And now Johnson was dying, so said the story; he had been carried ashore at the last voyage's end, a wreck of manhood, a seared and befouled horror. In a north-east coast sea village he was laid upon a snow-white bed, and a widowed mother, who had skimped and scraped, who had denied herself a hundred luxuries that her only son, her Benjamin, might answer the imperious call of that sea which was to shower golden gifts upon the lad, tended him with awed and sorrowful eyes. He would never recover; the foul poison had eaten too deeply into his system; he would die slowly—very slowly, but as surely as the sun would rise on sea and land alike.

Heavens! when one thinks of it all, it makes the gorge rise. Why should this prurient prudery stand always in the road of enlightenment—that enlightenment that spells young manhood's salvation? Why should a father be at pains to warn his son against the danger of playing with loaded firearms—which at the worst means but a clean, quick death—and keep him studiously ignorant of those other dangers which lead blind manhood into the mire that the pigs spurn with disgust and loathing? There is something wrong with our social system somewhere. Above all men should embryo sailors be set on their guard against the perils that lie in their path. Not vague warnings; not veiled innuendoes which serve to arouse curiosity without allaying desire. Why is the average father so bashful and tongue-tied in the presence of his son?

And I say again that fathers of embryo sailors must, if they hold any conception of decency and the sense of right, warn their lads against the life that lies behind that roseate veil. For the young sailor is vice's own special prey; he is thrown amongst men whose habitual conversation is gross and suggestive; who delight in recounting their amorous adventures; in foreign ports he is compelled to seek such plea-

sure (!) as offers, for lack of kindly, decent, and understanding society. He is alone, at an impressionable age; and he gathers, from the general run of the talk he hears, that it is a proof of manhood to—fall from grace. Not to have dallied amongst the shameful places was, in my day, regarded as something of a slur on one's full manhood; he was a hero who could boast of many adventures.

Not a pleasant subject, my masters, but there are more things in a sea-life that goosewinging a topsail off the pitch of the Horn. The young sailor ashore in a foreign port is no one's concern, save that certain well-intentioned people do endeavour to keep his feet in righteous paths—to the accompaniment of psalm-singing and prayer! And the average youth does not want either in his scanty leisure. He wants to see Life, and Life is not contained between the four bare walls of a Bethel. He seeks experience, and experience is not to be got on the penitent's stool. Why is it that the only resorts to which the sailor ashore has free entry are churches in disguise? Why must a man play the hypocrite to ensure himself winning friendship?

"It was Gordon Stables who kept me straight," pronounced Slumgullion. "Remember those talks of his in the old B.O.P.?"

Did I not? That wise man is dead long since, and by now he will know that two average lads, at any rate, managed to retain some shreds of decency amongst many temptations owing, in the main, to his outspoken warnings and guidance.

"Stand by to wear ship!" shouted the second mate, as we two lads dived deep into the ethics of human frailty and its strength.

There was no time now for heart-to-heart discussion; work was toward. The red eye of Tuskar was blinking on the starboard hand, and on our present tack it was hopeless to attempt to clear the land. The wind was westerling more than a bit; the

ship was breaking off; it was necessary to cast her about and steer to the south and east.

"Stand by to wear ship!" shouted Slumgullion and I; and a thin, ghostlike voice echoed the cry; there was a thin gleam of light on the wet decks as the forecastle door was opened and shut; through the drone and hiss of the sorrowful night came the clamour of the "timekeeper" arousing the deck-hands to a knowledge of the old sea-saying, "Growl you may, but go you must."

"Spanker-brails!" stormed the second mate, all on edge to prove himself a capable sailorman in the presence of the skipper, newly arrived on deck. "Lay aft here, you boys. Weather main-braces, the rest." We slid and slopped to our various posts; the mate, a growling, clumsy figure in thigh-boots and oilskins, clumped down the poop ladder and along the deck; he emitted a soul-tearing curse as a half-sea lolloped up over the fore brace-blocks and dropped on his sleep-filled head.

The ship was running off before the wind, as could be seen by her phosphorescent wake streamed widely out on her starboard quarter, in obedience to the heave-up of her helm. There was plenty of room to wear, and with her present canvas it was questionable whether she would stay, i.e. come round on the other tack through the eye of the wind. The —— was built to carry large masses of cargo through any weather that might happen along; she was not built to perform yachtlike manœuvres; and only under certain conditions of wind and sea did she tack decently; for choice, when sea-room permitted, she was generally wore.

And wearing is a slow, tedious job—perhaps that is whence it derives its name!—at the best of times; but on a black, rainful, spindrift-scattering night it is purely beastly.

Well for us boys that we knew our way blindfold about the decks! To see one's hand before his face

was a frank impossibility; to recognise one's companions save by their voices, as impossible. But we knew the lead of the spanker-brails and tailed on to them as the second mate slacked off the sheet; we "yo-ho'd" and "heigho-ed!" with the best; the water poured down our sleeves as we threw up our hands to take fresh hold of the dripping ropes; we stamped on one another's feet and cursed one another with astonishing vigour; and in the middle of it all who should come charging into the thick of the fray but Ginger, still three-parts asleep, but bursting with eagerness to do his best and pull his weight; he was as willing as an elephant and as clumsy; he stamped unmercifully on us, he crushed us down as he reached up for a fresh grip; he shouted a pully-haully song quite out of time to our hauling; and went on doing all these things until someone took advantage of a bit of a lurch to shove him to leeward, where he slid and stumbled and floundered until the spanker was brailed in, and we were ready at the weather braces to bring the mainyard round and let the ship run well away before the wind.

Out of the murk and the drive and the mist, as we waited, showed tier on tier of radiant lights. A big Cunarder outward bound, storming through the smother at twenty good knots per hour, was bearing down upon us; and panic ensued.

"Show a flare! Are those sidelights burning? Good God! she'll be into us!" Three different voices uttered the ejaculations; but there was no flare at hand; it had been overlooked in the pressure of more serious work. Many men were shouting at once, and no one seemed to be listening; then, beating down the clamour as the crash of a big gun drowns the rattle of rifle-fire, came the mate's composed, almost contemptuous voice:

"There's a fire in the galley if your matches won't strike, isn't there? Did you soak that oakum thoroughly?" And on the heels of his words a lurid

flare blazed up, showing in vivid detail the strained faces of expectant men, silvering the dripping rigging, casting weird, unreal, dancing shadows amongst the resonant hollows of the sails; revealing the ship in all the dishevelment of a half-completed manœuvre. By closing my eyes now I can see it all again: the dropped jaw of the big Martinique nigger of the port watch, his staring eyeballs, and his exposed and gleaming teeth; the somewhat bored indifference of Rhys's face; the skipper trying to conceal his nervousness under an assumption of indifference, though he had bitten clean through his pipe-stem; I can hear the sharp, staccato barking of the skipper's big St. Bernard dog, drowned down and enveloped by the stentorian braying of the Cunarder's syren as she sent a penetrating blast through the smother as a sign and a token that we had been seen, and that she would make it her especial duty to give us a wide berth.

But it was the mate—a man of resource—who had saved the ship from being cut clean in two. When the flare blazed out the liner's bow was less than four hundred yards from us, and was aimed unerringly at our broadside; she must have cleft us like a cheese, and with that sea running the possibility of saving life was problematical. The mate had seen the menace first; he had caught a sailor by the neck and pitched him down the forecastle-head ladder to the paint-locker, with instructions to soak the first wad of oakum he could lay hands on in turpentine and ignite it: "And never matter a damn about burning your fingers!" The port sidelight was black out—unnoticed by the lookout; and from the position in which she was approaching us, the big ship could not possibly have seen our overtaking light.

Almost as we drew in that laboured breath which follows crisis she was romping past majestically; and then, her myriad lights drawing out and blurring, as the sea-fog swallowed her, she was gone, like a destructive, resistless phantom; our flare burnt out,

and the night closed down doubly black by contrast.

"That's the life—no pully-haully there!" came clearly from the region of the main braces. "Home every three weeks—playing at going to sea, I call it."

"And what sort of a pay-day would you pick up at the end of three weeks, with a half-month's advance before you started the trip?" came in Rhys's condemnatory voice; and he coughed wheezily by way of emphasising the sentiment. "Painters and firemen the likes of her carry by way of a crew."

But one or two of us youngsters felt keen ambition grow to life in our souls; some day we, too, would pace a towering bridge and gaze down with pity and contempt on toiling windjammer men, who were always getting into the way of ships that really mattered and causing a waste of steam!

"Haul away main braces!" shouted the skipper impatiently; and the crisis was forgotten forthwith.

But it might have ended so differently. That razor-sharp bow might have carved its ruthless way through our thin steel plating as if it were tissue paper; the headlong drive of some twenty thousand tons driven at twenty-two knots might have crushed us down, trampled us under, spurned us aside in shrieking ruin; leaving such of us as survived to swim in ice-cold water and blinding darkness until merciful exhaustion ridded our souls of the will to live and lowered us kindly to the deep sea floors, there to drowse and rest until such time as there should be no more sea. For myself, I found myself thinking much of this hidden mystery of death: wondering what lay beyond the veil; wondering, above all, why I should be myself; puzzling over deeper matters than the handling of a wet-hardened brace; until the stamp of heavy feet on my toes brought back reality and the need for alert movement. After all, the soul of a man was his Maker's affair, but to the man himself was entrusted the safeguarding of his body; and a Russian

Finn's boot-heel grinding agonies out of one's favourite corn is a sure cure for soul-sickness; an excellent antidote to introspection.

The yards swung slowly round; there were cursing reflections on the indifferent organisation that caused large ropes to be rove through small blocks, thus adding to the sailor's labours; the head sheets were got over, and everything was trimmed and minutely adjusted; and then, close-hauled on the starboard tack, the ship commenced her laborious beat across to the Welsh land, fuming and writhing to the close-bitting of the pointed yards; curvetting and staggering she gathered speed and roared forward, making more leeway than she should have done, perhaps; but still doing the best she could to proceed gallantly upon her lawful occasions.

CHAPTER IV

A DEAD MUZZLER

THERE is, perhaps, only one thing more disheartening than a dead, dry beat down Channel on the outward passage, and that is to be wind-bound with an easterly gale off the Chops; to know that the thousands of watery leagues astern are safely overpast, and that days or whole tedious weeks might elapse before the welcome sight of the fussing pilot-cutter dawns on your view; and the freelancing tugs come ranging up within hail to barter with you for your hawser, and to tell you that, "Calm after storm, port after stormy seas, rest after toil doth greatly please."

The dead muzzler was holding with dogged persistency when the laggard dawn broke; the ship, with her fore topgallant sail handed and raggedly stowed to its yard, was ratching uncomfortably towards the Irish land again; her decks were a wilderness of dishevelment. The rain still slashed piteously down; the fog-swirls thinned and thickened, revealing now an expanse of wind-kissed, furious water, green-grey where it was not white-capped; veined along the troughs of the considerable combers with greyish white; now nothing but prisoning walls of yellow, which seemed to muffle the discordant bray of the fog-horn on the forecastle head, and to throw it back upon the ship like an attenuated echo of its real clamour.

"I remember," said Rhys, picking the fouled braces out of the scuppers and flaking them on the after hatch preparatory to the morning orgy of scrubbing decks; "I remember makin' a voyage aboard a Cunarder. A big ship she was, and run in the fashion

of a man-o'-war; they had masters-at-arms and petty orf'cers an' such. But her skipper was a panicky man uncommon ready to jump an' swear if the weather went back on him. One time we ran into a fog—'twould be somewhere west o' Fastnet—an' they turned on the old syren that sounded like as if all the mad bulls o' Bashan an' then some more were gettin' their tails twisted off. After a bit, what should happen—the watch-orf'cer bein' enthusiastic an' fuller o' zeal than Mr. Easy—what should happen but that they blew the top off the whistle! No more noise then, an' the word goin' the rounds that we might be on top o' the Limerick fishin' fleet afore we knew where we was.

"Says the skipper, hysterical-like: 'Get the hand-foghorn goin'. My God! we shall ram half the fishermen in the home waters afore we know where we are! Smack it about, in the name o' God!' So they slowed down a bit—officially, to satisfy the courts should we hit anything smaller than ourselves, though for myself I noticed no lessenin' in the beat o' the bullgines—an' they started up old Belchin' Fanny for all she was worth. 'Twas the sort of sound she made wouldn't have frightened a bird off a tree, but 'twas accordin' to the Act, just the same as is the issue of limejuice an' vinegar here-aboard. Hollow an' ghostly was Fanny's wail; seemed like as it came from far enough away. But it served; it served. It was like what soldier-men tell me the kick of their own rifle-butt is to them when there's fightin' goin' on: heartenin'; makes ye feel less lonely.

"So they called up the sixteenth or twenty-sixth engineer, an' he called up a greaser, an' a fireman an' a trimmer or two, an' they came on deck an' climbed the funnel for to hold a post mortem on that defaultin' whistle. After a bit it was decided the whistle-top was blown off—I told ye they ran the ship on Navy lines!—then they had to set-to to repair the damage done. But the whistle-top, that by the same token

had gone high in the air an' then dropped clean through the stained glass top of the ladies' drawin'-room skylight, had got cold while the base of the thing was still hot. So they tried heatin' the whistle-top till it stretched the size of the base, but they didn't get much forrader that way, it bein' perishin' cold on deck, with a touch o' sleet; so they did what they might ha' done a long while afore; they cut off the steam an' let the base-part get cool—the hand fog-horn goin' like stink all this time, ye'll remember: prolonged blast after prolonged blast, as is laid down by the rule of the road.

“Then they got the steam whistle fixed, an' the watch-orf'cer drags on the lanyard, an' ‘whip-oorroo-up!’ goes the steam syren.

“‘It works,’ says the watch-orf'cer. ‘Near about time, too. Will she blow off agen in my watch?’ he asks, an' the sixteenth engineer—or maybe 'twas the twenty-sixth—said such things as came uppermost in his mind. So the watch-orf'cer looses off agen, an' just as the din died away, ‘broo-oo-oo!’ comes from ahead, faint-like an' disconcertin'.

“‘By the chin whiskers of Job!’ the skipper yelps, though them wasn't precisely the words he used, ‘we're slap into him! Stop her an' full speed astern!’ he says, foam'in' at the mouth an' tryin' to climb up the wheel-house front, as was his way when panickin'. So they rang the engines to stop an' astern, an' the watch-orf'cer hangs on to the whistle lanyard like it was a lifebelt an' him the last survivor, an' away she brays an' brays, fit to start your soul from its bed-plates: three short blasts, an' then three more short blasts, as a sign an' a token to everyone about that we was goin' full speed astern. Then the watch-orf'cer lets go the lanyard to freshen the nip, an' once agen comes the bleat of a forlorn ship ahead.

“‘He's goin' astern, too,’ says the skipper, throwin' seven different sorts o' fits on his own bridge.

'Are we stopped yet?' But the watch-orf'cer didn't answer that question. He claps the megaphone to his mouth an' he sings out:

"'Fo'c'sle head, there!'

"'Sir?' sings back the lookout.

"'Are you still brayin' hell out o' that hand-foghorn?' he asks.

"'Yes, sir; no one told me to stop,' says thè lookout. So that's what it was: the hand-foghorn on our own fo'c'sle head; but the sound of it like a Norwegian timber drodgher in its flurry, an' we thinkin' of the medals an' gold watches we'd get for rescuin' the drownin' in deep water!"

Rhys was an inveterate yarn spinner, and he searched the farther ends of the whole seven seas for his reminiscences. But conversation is not encouraged aboard windjammers during working hours, nor is singing or whistling; and so we turned to to perform the morning ritual without further narration from Rhys. Because of the fog and the bad weather generally, together with the near proximity of land, the second mate relegated the duty of washing down to me, as senior apprentice, whilst he paced the poop with the usual sailor's lurch and swing: aft, to glance at the binnacle and the wake, to squint at the angle that wake formed with the ship's appointed track, which angle is the leeway or drift away from the wind, and must be allowed for when working up the dead reckoning; to 'bout ship and cast a scrutinising glance aloft at the weather leach of the top-gallant-sail, in order to satisfy himself that the helmsman was keeping her full and bye; to stride to the pin-rail at the poop's break, to glance aloft again; to order a boy aloft to overhaul a too tight buntline.

It gave one an air of authority to pick the brimming buckets from the hand that offered them, to lift one's leg in approved deep-water fashion and send the crisp and sparkling stream sluicing along the planking, whilst the watch, formed in echelon,

scrubbed diligently. A sailor never scrubs with a broom as a woman does; he reverses it and rests the wooden head on the deck; thus getting a wider sweep, more weight and efficiency, with less manual exertion.

Two hands at the head-pump kept the wash-deck tub full of water; two other hands filled and passed the buckets; and Slumgullion, who had appointed himself water-passer, practised tricks he had heard of in the way of sliding the buckets along the wetted decks, with the result that they either capsized half-way or arrived about a quarter full.

Then there was the skipper's bath-tank to be filled; and in the middle of the operation up came the skipper's daughter, bright and bonny, with a cheery "good morning" for such of us as were working aft; and the rigours of that day seemed to lessen appreciably at sound of her soft voice. Strange how different the atmosphere of a ship is when there's a woman aboard! And I will say this for such merchant seamen as I have shared brass-rags with: they possess an innate quality of gentility that instinctively forbids them from using deep-water language when there is any possibility of a woman being within earshot. Had Gwen strained her ears to their widest whilst she was aboard us she would never have heard a word likely to bring a blush to her cheeks; though behind closed doors it was different, perhaps!

The man at the wheel struck seven bells as we were working: twenty minutes past seven it was, and such of the crew as were required to relieve wheel and lookout and keep handy for working the ship at eight laid down their brooms and buckets and went below for breakfast, which the black cook announced by the simple expedient of shoving his ebony countenance, dripping with sweat though the morning air was raw and searching, through the lee galley door, and shouting in a rich, oily, Barbadian voice:

"Guess you chillun ob de watch below'd berrer get fed!" The port watch "Peggy" accordingly

visited the galley with a fourteen-pound butter tin, fitted with a strand of wire rope as a handle, and a tin mess-kitt; came away with steaming coffee and scouse, and we others, who must perforce wait till eight o'clock for our stomach's satisfying, toiled on, with fragrant odours wafted to our nostrils.

"Pull on the weather main brace," shouted the second mate, as we swilled the last bucketful of water through the scuppers.

"Fair wind comin', boys," chuckled one of the watch. "We'll be across the line a fortnight afore we've worked off the dead horse." But alas! it was no bettering of the wind that summoned us to the braces. It was simply the second mate's love of "frigging"; his rooted dislike to seeing the working hands of a ship idle for so much as a moment. Aboard a sailing ship at sea the watch on deck *must* work, if the weather conditions in any way permit: that is, at least, between the hours of five-thirty A.M. and six P.M. To be sure, there are endless "sailorising" tasks to be performed; the rigging and canvas are everlastingly in need of overhaul and repair; but I have known certain officers to whom the idea of a crew's possible idleness was so repugnant that they have set the hands to haul up the mighty chain cables from the lockers for'ard, range them along the decks as neatly as if they were on exhibition, and then stow them away again, link by thick-tarred link, simply to give them something to do and keep them out of mischief.

Even in "stand-by" weather, when ordinary work about the deck is not possible, the deck-watch is taken aft to the poop or stowed away under the forecastle head, and there caused to make sennit, robands for bending sail, bag o' wrinkling stuff, or paunch mats, or to chip out the various lockers that are more or less sheltered, whilst holding themselves in readiness to perform such handling of the storm-girt ship as might crop up.

It is queer how old associations cling ! The other day, in a sailing "Q" boat, where the chances of war had placed me, I was conscious of a sense of annoyance because the skeleton deck-watch which masqueraded as Italian mariners, smoked and loafed idly about the decks ; and the tendency was to find them some of the "frigging" work to do, although to smarten up the brig at all would have been to destroy her similitude to a second-rate Italian coaster !

Aft the watch trooped to the weather main brace ; we laid our weight to it and fell back ; one man appointing himself "singer-out." For, apart from the ordinary "chanty" which is usually called into use when a topsail has to be hoisted or some big concerted effort to be made, there is a whole series of these "pully-haully" songs ; incoherent words with a yelled fragment of a tune, which one big-voiced man gets off his chest, and at certain emphasised syllables the united pull is given and the work expedited.

It was Faulken who sang out on this occasion : his voice was about the most magnificent bass I have ever heard ; and there was some tang or drive in it that seemed to compel every man to pull his hardest. But, after we had gathered in the slack of the brace and got it as tight as could be, the second mate was still unsatisfied. He came to the break of the poop, and shouted :

"Oh, lay back on it, you paper-backed swabs ! Haul and split the wind !" That sickened us ; it was unnecessary work, and our sense of unfair treatment got into the ascendant. Automatically Faulken's cheery outcry ceased ; we laid back in silence.

"The greaser's tryin' to impress the skipper's daughter !" someone said distinctly. "He's showin' his authority like the blame' nigger pilot."

"Make fast main brace," said the second mate hastily ; and a sidelong glance at his face, which was flushing redly, indicated that the chance shot had not missed its mark. For though to answer an officer

back directly on shipboard is an act of insubordination, there are many ways of conveying to him a sense of dissatisfaction with the conditions that hold.

However, further "work-up" hauling on the braces was checked by the arrival on deck of the skipper—unshaven, red of eye and tousled generally, as a man is who has slept all night in his clothes, and been on deck half a dozen times—who gave the order to put the ship about at eight bells, and to take a cast of the lead. So that the toil should be fairly divided eight bells was struck at a quarter to eight, and the usual programme was gone through. As soon as the ship was wore round she was brought close enough to the wind almost to stop her way, and the deep-sea lead was carried to the forecastle head. Everyone to-day knows that a ship's position in shoal water can be found by taking the depth of that water and a sample of the sea's bottom, and comparing these results with the Admiralty chart which carries indications of varying depths and characteristics. The twenty-eight-pound lead has a concave aperture at the thicker end, and this hole is filled or "armed" with tallow, to which a sample of the sea's bottom will adhere, or, if that bottom be rock, will so dent the arming as to give proof that rock exists. The lead-line is divided as to its first twenty fathoms in the same fashion as the lighter hand lead-line, which is used when making port. At two fathoms is a piece of leather with two holes; at three fathoms is either a three-tailed bit of leather or a fragment of blue bunting; at five fathoms is a rag of white linen, and similarly at fifteen fathoms; at seven and seventeen fathoms red bunting serves sufficiently to indicate the quantity of line that is out.

Twenty fathoms' depth is indicated by a couple of knots of small cordage spliced into the lay of the heavier lead-line; each additional ten fathoms means an extra knot; and the intermediate fives are denoted by a single knot.

Three fathoms, five and seven, thirteen, fifteen and seventeen fathoms are "marks," other depths are "deeps." Why this should be so is buried in the grave with Noah and his contemporaries.

But the actual heaving of the lead is something of a picturesque ceremony; and in a day when patent sounders, which are worked by a small and powerful motor from a steamer's stern whilst she progresses at umpteen knots per hour, are the vogue, a description of the ritual may not be amiss. Hand-heaving of the lead is certainly not nearly so accurate a proceeding as taking a cast by Thompson's Sounder; but parsimonious owners of a decade or two ago spent as little as they could on patent "gadgets" for use aboard their ships; and human labour was required to perform many of the usual sea-going operations. And in a way the deep-sea lead was accurate to a fathom or two; which, considering the somewhat slapdash style of navigation which prevailed, was near enough. And when you have been, say, four months without getting a correction to your chronometer's rate; when an error of a minute in such a chronometer will throw you out a good fifteen miles in your calculated position, what's a fathom or two in the water's depth? But, all the same, woe betide the unfortunate master-mariner who lost his ship by stranding, if he could not prove that he had used the deep-sea lead consistently before the board of inquiry!

The duly-armed lead was carried to the fore-castle head; being led outside everything: that is, to seaward of the rigging and braces and so forth. At certain intervals along the ship's rail men were stationed; each man held in his hand a coil of the tough light lead-line. A small snatch-block was hitched to the mizen swifter; and the second mate stationed himself near-by. Down went the helm, and the ship came up into the wind, all of a shiver; as her way stopped the skipper shouted: "All ready; heave!"

Came from for'ard a long-drawn, not unmusical cry of "Waa-aatch, there, waa-aatch!" and the lead was swung well for'ard and dropped. As the line travelled out and down the next man cast his coil of line clear, took a plumbing up and down sounding; and, as there was no bottom indicated, he repeated the warning call of "Waa-aatch, there, waa-aatch!" and passed the matter on to his next number, dropping to the deck and running clumsily aft as soon as his hands were free. As the lead was hove to windward, so that the leewardly set of the ship should not foul the line or give a false depth, and as a vigorous sea was running, big water began to clamour aboard; there was an incessant scurry of high-thrown spray; the slooshing gurgle of solid water, the clank of wash-ports and the sucking hiss of the scuppers as an accompaniment, together with the noisy drumming of the canvas aloft and the general din that happens aboard ship when she is practically in irons in half a gale of wind.

It was the fourth man who struck soundings: somewhere about thirty fathoms as far as memory serves me; he shouted: "Bottom at thirty, sir!" plumbed a couple of times to make certain, and then abandoned the line and hastened aft to join the rest of us. The lead-line was "snatched" into the lead-block, we tailed on to the bight, and cheerily, because we were in a hurry to get below to breakfast, we rounded it in; the second mate steadying the lead as it came up the side of the ship, in order that the arming might not be loosened and lost in passage. A sailor was handy with a sheath-knife; he scooped out the tallow as soon as the lead was aboard and ran with it to the skipper, who carried it to the chart-house and there performed sacred rites which were more or less of a mystery to all of us at that time, and which we now know were not nearly so mysterious as they affected to be!

But it has always been the custom to surround

the navigation of a ship with a veil of awe and heavy mystery; and I suppose that custom will prevail for many a day to come. It is a survival, as so many sea customs are, of a day when a navigator was anything but sure of his whereabouts, and did not want the rest of the crew to become aware of his ignorance. Probably no man was more astonished than a windjammer's skipper of twenty-odd years ago when he found his navigation come right to a handful of miles! And not so very long ago as all that it was no uncommon thing for the veterans of the sea, when aiming for a port, to sail due north or south until they were exactly in the latitude of the port of arrival, and afterwards to sail exactly east or west until the place, or some land near it, was seen. But that was before the days of "Lecky's Wrinkles" and the intricate instruments of navigation that are the vogue amongst the smarter, newer generation of sea-officers, who are excellent navigators, if not, perhaps, quite such resourceful seamen as their ancestors were.

Apparently the result of this cast of the lead was satisfactory, for we were permitted to go below, by the mate saying: "That'll do the watch." We raced to the half-deck—and what a welcome haven it was!

"Whose Peggy is it?" asked Slumgullion, by force of habit, forgetting that as Ginger was the only unqualified lad in our watch he was doomed to perpetual peggying. But Ginger had a hankering after the fleshpots; he had, of a truth, the biggest appetite I have ever known a human being to possess; and he was not one to risk missing a spoonful by lagging behind the crowd at the lee door of the galley. He was a useful Peggy, too—there was something in his manner that convinced the black "doctor" that he was genteel, and our sable cook admired gentility as only a Barbadian black can. Result: the starboard watch of apprentices fared none so badly when it came to an extra ladleful of scouse, or an odd cabin biscuit

or so; and the chunks of meat that came our way were always the pick of the harness casks. And Ginger staggered manfully along with the coffee-can and the hash-kitt; and we cleaned our plates and pannikins roughly—it makes a man shudder nowadays to remember the general condition of our self-provided eating utensils!—and turned to with hearty appetite as soon as we could catch the pot and kitt from Ginger, who, as he hesitated at the door-sill, over which he could hardly lift his sea-booted leg, unfortunately trod on a piece of sodden biscuit thrown there by one of the other watch, and capsized headlong, afterwards sliding well to the lee-scuppers, where a nasty wave completed his downfall and sent him floundering and spluttering like a fish at the end of a line. But Ginger's sea-legs were his own affair; the hash and coffee were ours; and we did them ample justice, for, beyond a chance dry biscuit nibbled during the night, and another biscuit, buttered this time, with the quarter-to-five coffee that is always served before turn-to at sea, we had eaten nothing since five-thirty or so the previous night; and our stomachs felt much as though our throats were cut.

Scouse may leave much to be desired from the epicurean point of view. It is simply a cross between thick soup and thin hash: made of fresh beef, a few niggardly potatoes, much water, and perhaps an onion or two, seasoned to taste or to the cook's whim. But, with a handful of broken biscuit in it, it fills the gap well enough; and, if it is topped up with another couple of biscuits and jam or marmalade, it leaves nothing to be desired from the point of view of satisfaction. The less said about the coffee the better. They tell me they give condensed milk and suchlike luxuries to the seafaring apprentices of to-day; but we got no trimmings—the — was a "pound and pint" ship, which means you got your bare Board of Trade scale of provisions and not a ha'porth more: a pound of meat, a pound of biscuit, three

quarts of fresh water, and very little else per day. And when I remember old Ginger—gently nurtured as he had been—sneaking down into the lazarette to purloin a stray handful of flinty ship's biscuit when the steward was asleep, it makes me think that the Board of Trade scale of provisioning of that day was inadequate to satisfy the needs of healthy growing lads who were performing a steady twelve hours' strenuous work a day.

Meanwhile, these being the voyage's early days, we had our bulging tuck-boxes to go at; and, when the ship's grub left us with a vague emptiness beneath the belt, we filled up on our parents' gifts.

Yes, that ship's coffee was a fearful and wonderful concoction. We said a lot of sad, bad things concerning the origin of the berries from which it was reputed to be made; we vowed they never grew on any bush created by God or picked by man; it was bitter as gall, thick like mud, and of a colour indescribable; but it was piping hot, and if you sweetened it lavishly it lost its savage bite and its warmth was grateful to a degree.

"I've got a cigarette left," said Slumgullion, as we lolled replete on our sea-chests. "Have one?" We sacrificed to the goddess contentedly, occasional grunts betraying our contentment. It mattered nothing whatsoever to us just then that we had been practically all night on deck, wet through, chilled to the marrow, up aloft and down again, wearing the skin off our hands by mule-work on the braces; we were masters of our own destinies until the next call came for all hands; and we were fed. In a life that consists mainly of work, eat and sleep—with more of the former than of the two latter put together—food forms a big incident in the day; and there is apology for the authentic story laid at Ginger's door, that when a poetically-minded girl asked him what he considered to be the most beautiful experience he had ever known at sea, he said:

"To see a seven-pound chunk of salt-beef lying on the half-deck table, and to know the rest of the half-deck crowd are aloft."

The half-deck was in a terrible mess. It was foggy, close and evil-smelling, because of wet oilskins and wetter underclothing which draped the for'ard bulkhead. It was impossible to keep the door open, because of the heavy water that was half-filling the ship; the ports had to be kept closed because, if they were opened, a drift of water from the boat-skids set relentlessly towards them and deluged our bunks; and the skylight glass was broken, too; so that its canvas cover was battened down in place. Four or five inches of unclean water seethed and sluiced and gurgled on the floor; and every few minutes this was added to when a sea thundered aboard and struggled in through the chinks of the door. One of the sea-chests—Ginger's, of course—had never been lashed to the bunks behind, and with every lurch it slid across the deck as far as was possible, rested there until the weather roll came, rioted back, and so on—and, as it was nobly iron-bound as to its corners, a very Leviathan amongst sea-chests, there seemed every reason to suppose that sooner or later it would do about as much damage as the loose gun in Victor Hugo's story; but we didn't care.

We shouldn't have cared much if the ship had gone down, I think.

The only concession we made to the god of sleep was to strip off our oilskin pants; and then, fully dressed, wet through as we were, we rolled into our bunks, drew the dripping blankets well up about our ears, and were as soundly asleep in a couple of minutes as though we lay between silken sheets, on beds of down. We invited rheumatism and a thousand other ills; but we knew that if we were wanted we should be wanted quickly; and any delay in turning out meant at least a sharp reprimand and

possibly an ultimatum that we should stay on deck in the first dog-watch: that sacred two hours which seem to mean more than any other watch below of all the watches.

We wakened in a bath of steam to the strident yelling of Crowther. He had one of those rasping voices that would waken ancient dead men; and we sat up at once, thick-headedly, reaching for the inevitable oilskins before our eyes were properly unglued.

"Takes our watch to bring a fair wind," said Crowther conceitedly, as if he possessed some special virtue. "It's seven bells—not tack ship. She's come up to nearly her course. Bubbles is bringing the hash."

In stand-by weather it was a matter of courtesy between watch and watch to act as waiters on those below, that they might avoid the risk of a premature wetting by journeying to the galley and back. Sure enough Bubbles appeared, slammed in a kit of nameless soup, chiefly water and grease, with a stray shred of onion floating on top; a chunk of roughly-cooked beef and a few shrivelled potatoes. We had wolfed down a stodgy meal three hours or less before; but we fell to on this provender again and stowed it away, whilst Crowther regaled us with items of news from the deck.

"His name isn't Bubbles any longer," he declared, referring to our volunteer "Peggy." "Chicken it is for the future. Look at the feathers in his hair!"

Bubbles, who was to be "Chicken" henceforward so far as we were concerned, blushed piteously. But the tale was told spite of his perturbation. For'ard of the half-deck was the chicken coop, that had on occasion been used as a pig-pen. It was a commodious cage enough, stoutly built, and perched high above the wash of water along the decks; it was also sheltered in some measure from the bitter drive of the searching wind; and it had apparently

appealed to the youngster as a desirable haven of refuge. Into it he had crawled—fortunately the hens were stowed away under the fore-castle head, lest the spray should harm them—and in that unsavoury place, coiled up like a marmoset, he had slept serenely, indifferent to all calls for him, until the mate, prowling, had seen his boot soles showing against the bars, and had hauled him forth with growled comments on his choice of harbourage and threats to make him ride down the spanker-boom for the rest of the watch if he so much as absented himself from the deck for a moment during duty hours.

A trifling incident enough, but already the inevitable monotony of a long passage was settling down on us, and trifles loom largely in the daily scheme of things when months elapse without a single outside happening to intrigue you. Anyhow, we had a new name for the youngster, and he answered readily enough to it.

This ability to sleep in unlikely places seems common to all boys in windjammers. Whether it is that the wide open life, the strong breeze and the broken intervals of sleep combine together to breed drowsiness I do not know; but I have many a time found myself waking with a start when standing upright on my feet; and not one of us but could stow away a good sound nap whilst lying on rough chunks of coal, with nothing to soften them.

It was out on deck again, after scrambling into clammy oilskins, for us almost as the last mouthful was down; though we did snatch a hasty whiff of a pipe apiece, gloating over the fragrant shore tobacco, which bade fair soon to be exhausted. There would be nothing for us for the future months but "Lucky Hit," or "Happy Lovers," or some variety of black, sweating plug tobacco, cheap enough, and purer by far than the made-up concoctions sold in shops; but, because it belonged to shipboard life, to be abjured at every possible opportunity.

We bought that tobacco from the shop-chest, at a price of two shillings a pound, and with it we bought leal service from the fore-castle hands on occasion; for as the tot of rum is the standard of value in a Navy ship, so is the tobacco plug or the packet of matches current coin under the red ensign. Washing a tubful of dirty clothes—a loathsome job at the best—was priced at one plug, as was a hair cut; a pair of cunningly wrought shackles for a sea-chest brought a whole pound of the sticky stuff; whilst a half-model of the ship, with sails and everything carved out of wood, cost two pounds and not a plug less. And it was cheap at the price, considering the amount of tedious, painstaking labour involved.

Crowther's flaunting claim of a fair wind was, like many of his statements, exaggerated; for just as we showed our noses in the open the word was passed to wear ship once more, and the port watch growled bitterly at being deprived of precious minutes of their watch below. But it had to be done. Once more the helm was put up, once more the yards creaked round, and away we plunged, a bit to the south and a lot to the east, with the dirt coming up thickly to windward and every indication of really heavy weather everywhere.

The sun set that night in a bath of blood, ominously. Before dark the main topgallant sail was clewed up and handed, the mainsail was stowed, and the gear of the topsails was set clear for quick running.

"You'll need soul and body lashings afore eight bells," said Rhys, as we again came on deck at six o'clock, after two all too brief hours below; and he spoke no less than the truth. By eight o'clock we had the fore upper topsail off her, and at ten o'clock we were roused out to reef the main top-sail and to take another much-needed reef in the fore-sail. We were in for a dusting, and no mistake.

CHAPTER V

THE MIDDLE WATCH

STORMS affect various people variously. To me they have always possessed a splendid grandeur, a sense of enormous battling, of majestic scourgings. There are not a few sailormen of windjammer training who invariably rose to their highest climaxes during bitter weather, which seemed to strike some answering note in their cosmos and lift them to the level of the unconsciously heroic. The A.B. Rhys was such a man. The worse the weather the handier he was, full of resource, invariably cheerful and encouraging, ready to make light of all discomfort, and able to tell a racy and thoroughly fascinating yarn when by all the signs and portents the ship staggered on the narrow edge of destruction. On the homeward passage, through no virtue of my own, I found myself transferred to the port watch, and Rhys, the only fo'c'sle hand who remained aboard after reaching our first port, formed excellent company. But outward bound he was denied to us as an alleviation to dreary watches, and we had to make shift to occupy our own thoughts as best as was possible, drawing on past days ashore for comfort, imagining days ashore still to come when memories grew attenuated by many repetitions.

A middle watch, the "graveyard watch," is a long-drawn and tedious affair in bad weather. It brings the worst that wind and sea can do, and one wakens from a three and a half hours' caulk feeling as though he would give all the poor fragments of his soul to shirk these seemingly endless four hours

that lie ahead. And there is no shirking it, save by the day men, who enjoy the priceless luxury of an all night in. A modern sailing ship is so short-handed normally that the absence of a single pair of hands in a watch is not only immediately detected, but throws an added weight on the rest; and it is a point of honour amongst deep-water men to turn out religiously at midnight, whatever they might feel inclined to do.

For us of the half-deck crowd, deprived of an hour of our meagre watch below, our every inclination was to lie back and refuse to recognise the clamorous summons of the apprentice who roused us.

"He's taking the main upper topsail off her at eight bells," announced our disturber, and after that there was no question of pulling the steaming blankets about our ears. Judging from the scream and thunder outside it would need every man to handle that big sail. We turned out, our teeth chattering, to fumble thick-headedly for saturated oilskins and dripping sea-boots. And oh, but the memories of the shore crowded thick and fast! "Who'd sell a farm and go to sea?" More than ever did the conviction drive into our minds that it was the fool of the family who went to sea, and no wise man would attempt to earn his bread upon deep waters.

At home they would be snugly asleep, regardless of the drive of level rain on the window panes, regardless of rattling sashes and slamming doors; the wind in the chimneys would serve as a lullaby to their deep repose. Any crossing-sweeper, any hitherto despised "quill-driver" in the dingiest of musty offices, was entitled to his long night in, but we anathematised idiots must needs turn out to the headlong bluster of a full gale, to storm aloft and grapple with steel-hard canvas, whilst the jolting yard leaped and checked and lurched and whipped as if determined to sling us all off into yelling space; to tear one's nails down to the quick, to take a

hundred risks that were all unheeded in the taking; to clamber down again, with a grey-headed Channel comber in the teeth by way of a greeting; to flounder shoulder deep when you were not over the head in icy sea water; to—— Bah! Of a truth, who would be such a cast-iron idiot as to choose the sea as a calling?

“I’d rather be a bloyt,” growled Slumgullion, lashing the legs of his oilskins methodically about the tops of his sea-boots so that water might not penetrate to his socks, which were already saturated, but, because he had slept in them, were warm. No one ever discovered what a “bloyt” was. It was a favourite expression of the lad’s, and when questioned as to its inner meaning he invariably looked fearfully intelligent and somewhat patronising at the same time, and accused us of ignorance. I gather the particular person referred to was not engaged in a seemly profession. But when things were at their lowest with Slumgullion he invariably wished to be a bloyt.

“Come, Master Willy, sir, your hot ba-ath’s ready. Come for nice ta-ta with nurse!” crooned Crowther, entering with a rush that caused the smoky lamp to roar threateningly up the chimney and filled the already smelly room with a sickening odour of crude paraffin. Crowther was in a good humour. Why should he not have been? After a spell aloft he would get below for a blessed sleep. There would probably be no further call for “all hands” during the middle watch; and from the crumbs at his mouth corners he had evidently been playing the old game of carrying the cabin coffee aft to save the steward a journey along the wave-swept waist, in hope of earning as reward a brimming pannikin of the hot and comforting stuff, *with* milk, and with sugar ad lib.

“This nigger steward we’ve got’s no d——d good,” he announced, rummaging beneath his oilskin

coat, no easy task, considering the ropeyarn lashings about his body. He dragged a couple or so cabin biscuits to light and passed us each one. We munched as we completed our preparations for the deck. Compared with the Liverpool "pantiles" with which our bread barge was daily filled, cabin biscuits, soft and flavourful, were food for the high gods of Olympus. Then he pitched straight into his yarn :

"Went and called him when I called the second greaser. 'Fetch you the cabin coffee, steward?' I asked him. Big yellow brute he is. Lay there snuggled up in his frowsy flea-trap like a—dash it!—like a sultan. Got an oilstove burning, and everything a man wants to make him happy, and the fug—phew!" (A "fug" is nautical parlance for a frowst.) "All the mugs and biscuits piled ready on his settee. He's a lazy swine !

"He swore at me and told me to shut the door—it was slamming a bit; and it isn't nice to be sworn at by a mulatto, even if he is a steward. But I stood it, because he was the steward—the man who handles the cabin grub. When I looked at his yellow face I wanted to choke him, though.

"'Do you want your coffee brought?' I asked him again. 'Ya-ath,' said he. So I barged along to the galley—she shipped a sanakatowzer over the fore braces just as I was passing the main hatch—and I got the coffee-pot and charged aft with it under my coat. Never spilt a drop, never a drop of salt water got near it. You can trust your beloved Crowther anywhere. Into the beast's cabin I went. He was still lying on his back, with his shirt open and the ugly hairy chest of him showing.

"'Here's your coffee,' I told him.

"'Put it right dar!' said he. 'Chock him off, li'l boy, case I takes anodder li'l doze.' He didn't seem to know what I was driving at. He can't have been at sea before much."

Crowther paused to scrub match after sodden

match on a box that stripped its wet paper away wholeheartedly. Finally he lit his pipe by the simple expedient of holding it bowl downwards over the guttering lamp. Some fragments of the weed fell on to the wick and still further diminished the light, which was merely darkness visible. Every two minutes or less the half-deck shook and creaked to the impact of big water racing aboard; water spurted in suggestively at the edges of the doors.

I turned the lamp out. For the minute or two remaining before the striking of eight bells we would sit in darkness, so that our eyes would readily adapt themselves to the conditions existing on deck. Crowther remarked that it was as black as the hobs of the pit, and it is no pleasant experience to flounder about a deck where death is stalking everywhere, with dazed eyes, unable to see the perils that threaten.

"Said I to the steward," Crowther went on, puffing noisily—and his pipe squeaked and bubbled—"you don't seem to understand. I've brought the cabin coffee.' Said he: 'Didn't I tol' you to put it right dar?' He didn't seem to understand; he just lay grunting there with his chest showing. So I planted the coffee-pot plunk on his chest—and it was nearly red-hot at the bottom—and you ought to have heard him yell! He sat up in a hurry, and the coffee was all over him—over the bed too. Then I bagged the biscuits and came out; but he'll be after my blood to-morrow, I'll bet."

Opinion was divided on the wisdom of this action. Custom ordains that if a lad saves the cabin servant a wet and risky trip to the galley he should be rewarded by the gift of delicacies—fragments of cabin fare, perhaps even a mugful of the special coffee reserved for the afterguard. The steward certainly ought to have known that; but he was a man who had it in his power to render a good many services to us as a body. He "whacked out" the grub; and the B.O.T. ration was pitifully inadequate to our

needs. If we were in good odour with him we stood to get extra weight. On the other hand, the idea of gentlemen ropehaulers being required to truckle and toady to a half-caste domestic was unpleasant. But further discussion was ended by the thin tinkle of the bell aft, and on its heels :

"All hands stand by main tops'l halliards!" in the mate's monstrous voice, that treated the yelling gale as though it were a zephyr.

Out we went, lashed as to waist and leg with rope-yarns, our sou'-westers firmly tied on, with our sheath-knives belted outside everything for handiness. Ginger, leather-booted as usual, came to grief as soon as his feet touched the deck. The ship gave a sick roll, a smother of water romped over the main brace-blocks, and our messmate lost his footing, slid thuddingly to leeward, and—we heard his fantastic anathemas come in streams. But he was old and ugly enough to fend for himself. We oldsters scrambled up to windward, worked our way to the topsail downhauls, and there, amongst a medley of men, all dripping, all growling, we got hold of the gear and waited till the clattering riot of the topsail halliard blocks should give us our cue. The mate was attending to the halliards in person. We heard him cursing heavily. Someone had been sent to see them clear for running, and here they were all tangled anyhow, with a bight through the scuppers and merry hangment prevailing generally. But a wave deluged the mate and cut short his remarks, and somehow he contrived to slip the rope off the pin. But the yard did not thunder down; the weight of wind in the sail was such that the parral jammed fast, and it required strenuous hauling, with all our weight on the ropes, to start it on its downward career; and even then we had to mule it as hard as we could to get the spar down. A buntline carried away; there were astounding slattings and bangings aloft; the slackened sail seemed to be threshing itself

to ribbons. Chains clanked, ropes thrummed, all was riot and impenetrable blackness. And water poured about in merciless avalanches; we were always up to the waist, sometimes we were actually over head. We worked in a frenzy. We did not care for life or death. It was becoming a matter of our personal honour now to get the big slamming sail under control. Every man was working "all out," putting forth the exertion of a strength he did not know himself to possess; discordant cries sounded as each worker sang out his own pully-haul song as soon as he got a grip of a rope. Then Faulken's monstrous voice silenced all others as it had done before.

"O-o-oh-ee-yah! Ee-ay-boyah! Oh, stow that sail there! To-oo-gether." Concerted action had its inevitable result; the yard came down on the lifts; the remaining gear was snugged up.

"Up aloft and stow it. You coil up the gear, Ginger!" It was a voice speaking from darkness into darkness, but it was a voice to obey. Up we climbed to windward—and it was a climb up that angled deck. The green water slashed and battered without respite as we swung up over the sheerpole; heavy boots trampled on our knuckles; kicks were delivered in our faces; sharp threads of steel wire ripped our oilskins. We didn't care. The sooner aloft the sooner below again. It had to be done, so let's get at it, was our motto.

Once over the sheerpole, away from the shelter of the bulwarks, it was possible to obtain some idea of the wind's force. It was a solid thrusting power, a velocity in being, something that spreadeagled a strong man helplessly against the shrouds, something that tore his oilskin from its lashings and flung it blindingly over his head, that tugged at the sou'-wester moorings with a force that appeared about to tear off not only the cap but the head it covered, a force that brought the spindrift rattling like grape-

shot against us when we were three-parts of the way to the top, a dazing but fury-breeding onslaught, indescribable by ordinary standards, as though the whole world were rushing headlong through thunderous space to its doom. There was no lightning to relieve the sombre gloom; all was blackness, save where the wind-licked wave-tops showed white and unreal, and where sprays flung over the weather side light, to show up momentarily as clustered emeralds, and then to fall away into a void as infinite as what lies on the hither side of the grave.

As good sailors should, we took firm hold of the shrouds, for ratlines have been known to carry away to a man's weight, and if the handgrip be not secure catastrophe might result. Up and up we crawled, fighting for every step of the way, with the ship performing an immoral fandango beneath us. Immediately behind me was the second mate, his harsh voice uplifted as he called heaven's curses on all such as failed to see where they planted their feet. When a set of obviously human knuckles were felt under one's boot soles one had been a fool to neglect an opportunity, and the curses were redoubled in violence. Even when up aloft on a nasty night the human brain remembers certain things; and, all said and done, the second greaser *had* insisted on all three of us remaining on deck.

The weather yardarm is the post of honour when big storms are out. Our simple creed was that only scrimshankers hung in the bunt of the yard, and it was in obedience to this creed that we three, Slumgullion, Crowther and myself, made our best time aloft. We leaped out from the topmast rigging to the footrope of the yard on each other's heels and began that outward pilgrimage, which seemed as nothing in the performance, but which, in the retrospect, is bewildering. It was the weather inner bunt-line that had carried away, and as a result the bellied back sail was high over the yard, frapping and

thundering with an earnestness in which we saw nothing to admire. To get past that noisy, hammering immensity out to the extreme of the yardarm was something of a problem; and afterwards, in the half-deck—a very parliament of debate leading nowhere in particular—we discussed the problem at length—as to whether the journey meant navigation or seamanship. In the doing it meant hazard, the loss of no little skin from the knuckles, slogging blows in the face, and one or two slips that would have spelt the end of all things for us had we not possessed the sea apprentice's grip, which is more tenacious than the grip of an octopus.

No, my masters, it is no jest to work out along a sliding, extremely elastic footrope that is jerking and dancing as man after man jumps upon it, now dropping down so that one's gripping hands are 'way above one's head, now flung upwards so that the middle part of the body is over the yard and one is almost precipitated over the fore part of the sail, especially when the sail itself has been so newly and thoroughly bent to the iron jackstay that to force one's holding fingers between headrope of sail and iron of jackstay means the exertion of considerable strength. If you add to these obstacles in the path of steady progress such matters as the swing and giddy jerk of the yard itself to every erratic movement of the plunging, half-wild hull beneath, the battering-ram effect of the high-flung sail, the fact that the man immediately to windward of you is chewing tobacco and expectorating enthusiastically—chiefly in your smarting eyes—you begin to get some notion of what a job aloft on a dirty night is like. The main drive of the wind snatches at you, it seems to yell mockingly in your ears, it flings your oilskin coat above your head when such a hindrance is even more exasperating than usual, it drones down on you with the weight of a stunning blow; eddies shriek and yelp at you, they catch you unexpectedly as

you brace yourself to meet the full force; you hang for horrid seconds and feel your numbed fingers slipping, slipping, unable to retain their clutch; you have time to wonder whether you will go overboard and drown, or to the deck and be smashed like an egg; and then a maniacal fury takes possession of you, and somehow you find yourself out at the yard-arm, not in the least knowing how you got there, but rather disposed to think you climbed to the topmast head and slid down the wire lift that takes the yard's weight when it is lowered. Either that or you must have leapt bodily into space and caught at a chance rope as you leapt; but the main thing is that you have crossed the gulf, and are free to grapple like the devil himself with a mass of furious canvas that seems completely lost to all sense of fair play.

Within a minute a man is sweating as though on the Equator; he is exerting every ounce of physical strength he owns. The battle fury of him, which, as more recent experience goes to show, equals the actual fighting fury of war, is such that he feels he would rather die than give up the struggle; though there is also a temptation to whip out one's sheath-knife and cut the beastly thing adrift, and rid the owners of some ninety pounds' worth of brand-new sail; but the main blind and unreasoning thought is that the sail is going to be stowed somehow.

We three apprentices cast ourselves upon the task with some experience to guide us. Slumgullion, to windward, caught the sail's leach and dragged that inelastic wire rope up under his chest, grabbed the slack of the sail, such as there was, brought up a fold sufficient to allow us others to get our fingers into the canvas. We hauled and "yo-ho-ho-ed" for all we were worth, and got in a pile of sailcloth; we cast ourselves upon it, and—the wind laughed at us and tore it clear again!

It was all to be done afresh, and this time with

the first fine frenzy abated. It became solid, uninspired mule work, with curses instead of words of cheer, when the frayed temper caused splenetic words to be shouted into the faces of one good chum after another, when the canvas was twice as hard and unsympathetic, the mad pranks of the wind ten times fuller of vicious spite. But it had to be done; there was no discharge in that war. And it was done, somehow. Will any who read these lines, I wonder, remember that dizzy seat on the oscillating footrope, the search for the elusive gasket that had been shifted from its old-time place, the finding of it jammed between stirrup and yard, the tugging and the blasphemous invectives hurled upon the souls of those guilty of the shifting, the groping up the fore part of the yard for the outreaching hand of the other man, the lift of the shoulder under the bagging bight of the sail, the passing of fresh turns? It all seems dreamlike and unreal to-day, but twenty years ago it was different. One took a keen professional pride in so stowing the sail that if all the winds of all the skies blew together there should be no bursting loose from imprisonment, no need to send the watch up aloft to restow an insecurely handed sail.

Meantime the lee side had been stowed, and the bunt was hoisted well on the yard—the second mate officiated there, as was his right and duty—and Rhys and Faulken had worked a dogged and tenacious way out from the quarter of the yard to meet us working in. And then, as the last gasket was passed, to make all things secure, it was possible, whilst awaiting the clearing of the crowded footropes, to spend a moment in staring through sore, spray-filled eyes at the picture presented by the stripped ship in her tenacious battle with the unchained forces to which she was opposed.

Clark Russell has done it infinitely better than ever a feeble imitator can hope to do. Ordinary language fails to describe the sheer welter and

savagery of the sight. Polysyllables are needed to tell of the striving. Stand on the crumbling sea wall as the gale-driven breakers surge in, check, fling high in spray and fall like furies on the man-made barriers, and try to tell satisfactorily of the sight you see. Imagine that moderately solid foundation on which your feet are planted to be a reeling, leaping, cavorting fabric, slammed together in some inconspicuous shipbuilding yard, a construction of three-eighths-inch steel, built primarily for the stowage of cargo, simply a hollow girder pointed at one end and flattened at the other, a thing of commercial ugliness, lifted high to the summit of waves that look like the Alps in motion, dashed down, writhing and straining, into deep, foul-smelling chasms, and then you might begin to conceive what a windjammer of the end of the nineteenth century was like when out on her lawful occasions. Picture the fore part disappearing under solid black water that changed swiftly to churning white smothers; picture that fore part roaring upwards until it seemed the ship must stand on her stern and swing over sideways, whilst the invading water cascaded furiously along the decks to the dim-seen poop and covered that in its white fury.

Our eyes had long ago grown accustomed to the gloom; it was possible now to distinguish many features outstanding from the common turmoil. Gaunt above us was the harping tracery of the denuded spars; forward the squatness of the foremast was astounding. The thin arch of the reefed foresail showed black against the grey blackness of the night; beneath that arch showed steadily pouring white water, as sea after sea rioted over the forecastle head and creamed into the waist. The whole ship's hull was outlined in foam, white and deepening to grey before it merged into the surrounding uncertainty. The waves roared up, checked as they struck the bluff of the bow, and then piled high above the weather

cathead, glimmered greenly as the glare from the starboard side-light caught them, and fell.

It was inspiring to watch the work of the ship herself from this eminence. Crowther was all for getting below as quickly as it could be done; but Slumgullion had an artist's eye, and for many a minute we clung aloft, staring into the tumult, watching the almost human cunning of that far from beautiful fabric which held our destinies. She was like a fighting soul adrift against all the powers of darkness; she stormed through and under like a Viking gone Berserk might have stormed through massed foes. She was laden to her capacity, but she possessed a reserve of buoyancy that helped her no little; she soared giddily to hurrying wave-crests, poised, tremulous, then plunged with a roaring grandeur down into the eddying troughs; she shook herself petulantly as the bite of the combers oppressed her; and up she came again, undaunted, defiant of the worst the elements could do. When she cringed she did it as though with premeditation, playing the jiu-jitsu trick, allowing the enemy to expend its major force against an unresisting bulk; but as the blow fell, almost before its power was expended, she was gathering herself together for a fresh drive forward. It was as though her builders had built some indomitable spirit into her. When a watery mountain upreared to windward and came racing on, gathering bulk and impetus as it came, she did not slink away in cowardly fashion; she braced herself with suppleness; when the torrent fell she laid inert for a second, but then even aloft we could feel the quiver of continued life run through her; we could feel the tensing of the hull for that tigerish spring that should send her triumphantly onward.

The motley voices of the gale were all about us up there: the strong, sustained droning note which is the true voice of storm and marks its main attack;

the whimpering screams of the eddies fighting amongst themselves about the stripped yards and the resonant rigging; the shrieking yell of the squalls, gales in miniature and bred of the parent gale; the dull diapason boom that came from the deflected wind as it smote our ship's deck and recoiled, to mingle with the greater unrest outboard. There were other sounds a many: the cavernous turmoil in the bellies of such sails as still remained set, the driving hiss of high-thrown spindrift; but all sounds, though distinct to the trained ear, really combined into one unholy outburst of sound such as must have been amongst the far-flung stars on Creation's first appalling day.

And then, biting cleanly through that vortex of unrest, came a single sharp report like the crack of a gun. The ship seemed to shake herself in new freedom; there followed a furious slatting and banging; metal clanked on metal.

"Fore staysail's gone," said Slumgullion. "That finishes our little siesta up here!"

We got down quickly, in time to join the watch at the downhaul. Normally that fore-and-aft sail came down with a run; to-night we had to lead the downhaul through a snatch-block and tail on to it with all our strength, whilst the canvas slammed itself to ruin and the sheet-blocks hammered themselves to splinters. But it was all in the day's work, as was the bending of a new sail to replace this ruined one, for without that triangle of head canvas the ship griped unmercifully and was almost uncontrollable. It was no light matter: the required sail was, as is always the case, close-stowed away beneath all the other sails; and topsails and courses, top-gallantsails and jibs had to be hauled clear down in the noisy forepeak by the insufficient light of a smoky guttering hurricane lamp that was on its last legs. But we found the requisite sail at length, hauled it on deck, fitted it with robands and bent it

roughly, though securely, working in the utter darkness now, for a fresh and still more furious squall was driving down, as though the gale were calling up its final reserves to deliver the knock-out blow. A wild nightmarish business it was, for the ship was never still; green water poured incessantly aboard; the sail was saturated, and at every roll it careered wildly to leeward, taking us with it; or the wind would worry at the ropeyarns that secured it in a roll, snatch them adrift, and try all it could to take the whole caboodle overboard—sail and men and all.

But, as we said, it passed the watch away, and gave us something else to think about than our own discomforts. It is only in retrospect that those discomforts stand out; at the time we were, I think, mainly conscious of a mad determination to get the—adjected—sail bent at any cost.

“Watch aft on the poop—keep handy,” said the second mate, when the newly bent sail was hoisted and the sheet sweated aft. So aft we went, to stow ourselves away where shelter might be found: between the harness-casks, under the lee of the chart-house, under the wheel-grating, even; anywhere where we could obtain a bit of rest from that terrific drive of agitated air which was solid in its relentless purpose.

Very often in more peaceful days have I wondered what feelings actuated the skipper during these hours of strife. To command a ship in a storm is perhaps the loneliest thing imaginable. That is the keynote of the picture as I see it now: its utter loneliness. Here was a man who held the ship’s fate in his own two hands. He might not ask advice from any subordinate, for the sailing-ship captain’s dignity is a fearful and wonderful thing; he must not admit to human weaknesses and uncertainties before those who look to him for leading and salvation. There is no court of appeal for him to

approach, and he must be prepared to make quick decisions and abide by them or change them an instant after they are made as the quick-moving situation changes. Physical fatigue he must endure, for the poop is as savagely exposed to the worst the elements can do as is the forecastle; and the mental strain of handling a ship in heavy labour is far from inconsiderable. Even the best human brain gets dazed when a wind that blows at seventy miles an hour is driving without any let-up against its casing; and in addition to the main discomforts there are a hundred trivial annoyances; there is the practical impossibility of keeping dry and warm; the hammer-hammer of the sprays against one's face; the inability to stand erect, the need to cling to pin or swifter for foothold; the difficulty of transmitting orders; above all, there is knowledge, no light matter, that if the ship be lost or gravely damaged the captain's shoulders alone will be compelled to bear the weight of blame. Further, there is the moral responsibility for the lives of ship and crew, altogether apart from the legal responsibility; and only one who has commanded a ship in such circumstances can realise the doubts and fears that career through the guiding brain.

Our captain was anything but a demigod; we of the half-deck hated him cordially, I think, because he failed to come up to our boyish standard of "decency"; he was prone to bully and hector; he had no earthly use for "the boys," believing that we were sent aboard by the owners to spy and report on his doings. He showed no hesitation in unloading unsatisfactory stores on us, when they were refused by the men; in port he would—as shall be shown—make us work cargo all day and then take the boat ashore and wait for him to enjoy himself in boisterous saloons half the night. He sneered at us on every possible occasion; he skimped us of pocket-money when in port, and he tried his best

to limit our recreations at sea; but he was a man to admire now, when the ship depended on him for its continued existence as a ship. Unquestionably he was a sailor, wise in the lore of storms, trained in this endless combat which the sea thrusts upon its devotees; and when he gave an order he gave it with a snap and force that carried conviction to all who heard it and bred confidence in their hearts when confidence was at a low ebb.

The impression he conveyed to us all—and we accepted it unconsciously—was of rigid strength and undeviating resolution.

“Knows his job, the skipper,” said one of the forecastle crowd, snuggled up beside me between the harness-casks. “I’ve sailed with skippers who got blind drunk in half this weather. Narrow waters, too.”

The right note was struck there: a gale in open water is nothing by comparison with one in soundings. There is room to move and to manœuvre; the seas may be bigger, but they run with a more even sweep; there is none of that short, heart-breaking chop which strains a vessel’s seams and beams and causes her rigging to slacken and her masts to play alarmingly. You have a cleared ring for the bout, with no intruders upon your privacy; there is no fear of being blundered into by some “ram-you damn-you liner”; of blundering into some hove-to coastwise craft. And your crew have suppled and got the hang of the ship by the time you leave soundings; you have sized them up and know their capabilities.

With us we had one big fact to reckon with. Although the ship was working to windward as well as was possible, she was also drifting bodily to leeward; and under our lee, not so very far away as all that, was some of the worst coastline in the world. Close-hauled as she was, she made a considerable drift, because her actual headway was negligible;

and, further than that, we had an assortment of bewildering tides that ran with the speed of a mill-race to cope with. In daytime it would have been bad enough; at night, impossible to see the creaming warning of the breakers, impossible to hear their threatening thunder through the turmoil, it was a hundredfold worse. First thing we should know, if our fate were against success, would be the harsh scream of agonised metal as it tore against the age-old rocks; and after that—we should hear but little more. And there were hours, and dreary hours, to wait before the first gleam of daylight showed to give us guidance.

No enviable thoughts, these, for one man's harassed brain to hold. Here was a ship worth many thousands, containing a cargo worth perhaps ten times as many thousands, with the lives of some thirty men, to be worried through whatever happened along; to be cajoled and forced, driven to madness almost, if the need arose; to be harried to the performance of impossibilities; and the man who was to do all this was paid the stupendous salary of eighteen pounds a month! And if he failed to do it, there were dozens, if not hundreds, of men equally capable, as highly, if not, indeed, more highly, qualified, who would exult at thought of being offered the job! Something for Britons to ponder over, when it is remembered that, in peace as in war, it is by the work of such men and such ships that the Empire continues to exist.

So you see Captain ——, swinging to the ugly swerve and lift of the vibrant hull, staring at his sorely tried canvas, and knowing that if it went the ship would broach to and founder; staring into the eye of the wind, reading hope or menace in trivial alterations in its voice; marking the furious onslaught of the breaking water on the close-battened hatches, and knowing that if those hatches went and the cargo were damaged, he would not be held blame-

less; staring to leeward occasionally, seeking for some warning of the peril that lay there; wet to the skin, hungry; stumping to the ill-lit chart-room to pore over the grease-stained chart, to measure trivial distances with dividers; to examine sailing directions—doing and thinking a score of things at once, and with never a living soul in whom to confide his fears—aloof, unapproachable.

There he would remain—between weather poop and chart-house, until the day came and revealed all that threatened; and there he would remain long after, if the gale continued; for he was captain of the ship and his common duty was to see her through her troubles so long as his strength endured.

Yet the mate was as accomplished a seaman as he was himself; but by the law of the sea the mate must serve and not command; if he were given orders that in his belief were wrong, he must obey them to the letter, and by their result must the captain abide. I have never yet come across a ship-captain who was content to go below and leave his ship to a subordinate officer in times of stress; the relegation of responsibility is almost unknown in the merchant service.

But I have known them keep the deck through the worst of weather the world's several oceans can produce, eating and drinking casually, with the bitter blizzard chilling the food ere it reaches their lips, blowing the coffee from the cup as it is lifted; wakeful for seventy hours at a stretch, cool and calculating at all times, sitting on camp stools when the wearied legs give way; fighting valiantly with their backs to the wall, with hope diminishing to an infinitesimal thing; humouring their ships when they needed humouring; driving them as they showed reluctance to face the smother; skilful and daring always, as they carry the far-flung red ensign to the world's farthest confines, without the consciousness that they are doing anything out of the ordinary.

It was about three o'clock that a stabbing pinprick of light showed dimly to leeward; a warning cry was sent aft by the lookout, who, unable to keep the forecastle head, was snugged to leeward of a stowed main topmast staysail on the top of the forward house.

"Get a bearing of it, mister," roared the skipper; and the second mate clumped to the top of the half-deck, where the standard compass was situated. It was a land-light—that was discernible already—and it marked a dangerous promontory on which the ship would go to pieces like a kicked match-box if she struck. It lay dead to leeward, and the storm-fog had blinded it so that we were well within its range when it was sighted.

The second mate bent over the binnacle; we could see his sou'westered head silhouetted against the faint glow, the golden gleams on his dripping shoulders. He reported the compass bearing.

"Right; keep your eye on it." There was no tremor in the unmusical voice, no suggestion of nervousness. Yet the ship's position was precarious in the extreme, for it was going to be a gamble whether she would claw to windward of that point and reach more open water beyond, or whether it would be necessary to wear her round and stand north and west again. A simple choice to the uninitiated, but to wear a ship in that kind of weather was no joke.

"How's she bearing now?" asked the skipper in a jarring voice.

"Same as before, sir."

"Let me know when she changes her bearing."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The hurl and drive of the gale continued with unabated fury; the ship seemed to increase her uneasiness, as though she scented this new menace and feared the issue.

"Keep her up to the wind; don't run her off!"

bellowed the skipper, moving aft to the wheel. "Is she coming up any?"

The helmsman's answer was inaudible; but the gleam of the binnacle lamps on the captain's face as he peered into the brass hood showed that face to be twisted into a grimace of displeasure. The brows were drawn together in a frown; the whole countenance was bereft of softness; it was as though carved from solid teak. But he remained silent; he appealed to no one for advice.

"It 'ud be a lark if we had to club-haul her," said Slumgullion, who had been growling the tag of some sentimental song of the music-halls for an hour or so in an unmusical voice. "Remember 'Peter Simple'? A bit of a graft in this, though."

We had held long-winded arguments in the half-deck on the seamanship recounted in certain famous books; we had witnessed not a few intricate evolutions, but that an actual case of club-hauling should come to our notice was too much to expect. Really there was no need for this complicated manœuvre—a manœuvre only performed when a ship is practically *in extremis*. We had more sea-room than had Peter Simple's ship, for the principal thing; and if we had indeed been forced to take that drastic step, it is doubtful whether this narrative would ever have been written, for with our skeleton crew the chances were much against a successful termination.

We huddled there between the harness-casks, exchanging fitful remarks. We weren't scared in the least; queerly enough, we relied entirely on the skipper. It was his affair, anyhow; he knew what he was about. Time enough to worry later on, maybe. Meantime, if it meant wearing ship—and, of course, they'd wait until eight bells—it also meant a further loss of sleep in those bunks which seemed to call to us with an actual voice.

A blinding squall, with hail as its herald, charged down on us; the beat of the wind was such that to

talk, even to think, were impossible. The ship felt the added weight of that frantic onslaught; she bridled and twisted like an animal in agony; she heeled over and still farther over, until a white bank seemed to uprear itself over her lee-rail. There was an indescribable tautness about everything, as though every strand of the gear aloft were strained to breaking point.

"Something'll go!" said the deck-hand beside us. "She can't stand this!" But she did stand it. It was the mate's good seamanship that we had to thank for that: his painstaking supervision of everything aloft. A single weakness anywhere must have meant the loss of our sticks, but the good rigging held strongly. It is impossible to estimate what the ship's speed was during the minutes that trenchant squall lasted, but it was enormous. She raced through the water, now beaten flat, milk-white everywhere, like a meteor racing through raw space; the hiss of her reckless progress seemed louder even than the gale's vindictive note. And then, when it seemed as though she could no longer endure that pitiless assault; when we of the watch began to crawl up to the weather side, with some vague idea of meeting our fate in the open, fighting, the wind-pressure relaxed, the ship surged on to a more even keel; from the blackness overhead showed a wan, pallid gleam of moonlight. It was possible to see the frenzied scud racing across the fitful glimmer, to gain some idea of the magnitude of the firmament and the triviality of the ship. It seemed ridiculous that such a tiny thing should have survived the battle.

"She was doing fourteen in that squall," averred Slumgullion. We did not contradict him. Possibly she was doing more; the second mate afterwards gave his opinion that the velocity of the wind at the squall's climax exceeded a hundred miles an hour, but probably he exaggerated, as he was prone to do; and equally probably, when he told the tale of that

night ashore, he made the wind to blow at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. He was a man who liked to create an impression and figure largely in the limelight!

"Weather main brace," came from the skipper a few minutes later. We could hardly believe the evidence of our senses—weather main brace! That meant that a fair wind was on us; it meant an end to the muling and savage, heart-breaking toil of beating down-channel.

We went down to the braces with ardour; we should have something to tell the port watch when they came on deck. Trust the starboard lines to bring good weather! We checked the after yards with a will, shouting our delighted discords, careless now of the beating sprays and the ship's giddy plunging dives and lifts.

"Oh, square her in! Oh, get her going! Oh, square that yard!" The water seemed warmer as it crashed and billowed under our armpits; the wind was lessening; trust the starboard watch to see the old hooker through her troubles.

"Shake the reef out of the foresail!" We boys ran aloft happily; we cast adrift the gaskets that we had passed not long before. Reef-earrings were let go, the gear was overhauled; down on deck the sheet was bowsed aft and the tack brought home.

"Loose the main upper torps'l," came as we trooped aft again. And by the time eight bells sounded the ship was moving vigorously towards the open sea. The middle watch was over; with a fair and vigorous wind the voyage was really commencing.

CHAPTER VI

"EVERY HAIR OF HIS HEAD A ROPE-YARN "

"AND that's what you might call a h——l of a turn-out!" said Rhys. "Paid off with an eighteen months' pay-day, out of 'Frisco, so please you, less than a fortnight ago, and would you look at that?"

He drew blasphemous attention to his so-called outfit. It was certainly nothing to brag about, judged by the half-deck standard, where we had been initially rigged out by outfitters who thought more of our parents' credulity than our possible sea needs. Rhys had come to sea close-hauled, and it appeared impossible that a man could exist with such a paltry kit.

"That swab of a boarding-house keeper skinned me clean," he said ruefully, diving into a sorry canvas sack, which bulked largely, though it showed more angles than a well-stocked kit-bag should. It had been a handsome bag in its day, too. There were five-pointed stars skilfully painted upon it, and the shackle that closed its mouth for transit was a masterpiece of skilful ropecraft. Rhys lugged purposefully and brought to light a pair of woman's corsets!

"No use to me without something inside 'em," he observed philosophically. "Try again, bullies." The next dip brought up a second canvas bag, which hung in suspiciously loose folds. Opened, it disclosed a frameless mirror, broken at each corner and cracked clean across its middle.

"More than enough for all the beauty that's mine," said the A.B. "What next, I wonder?"

It was more curiosity-arousing than a lucky-bag;

what we had already seen whetted our appetites. In succession came a pair of carpet slippers, two ragged shirts, a small-tooth comb—“and that’s a handy thing to have at sea, by this and by that,” said Rhys—a bar of salt-water soap, the broken bottom of a tin lamp, a soldier’s scarlet tunic, minus buttons, two pairs of shameful dungaree pants, and an assortment of bits of sacking, fragments of rope grummets, an ancient pipe that later made everyone violently sick who tried to smoke it, and very little else. Rhys carefully laid this unique assortment on the thin end of the spare spar and surveyed it critically, scratching his head meanwhile. The longer he looked at the junk the less likeable did it become.

“And he didn’t even slam in a donkey’s breakfast,” said the sailor, tearing his shirt up from his belt. “Look at that, now, would you?” All down one lean flank were deep red wales, the imprint of the uncovered bunk boards upon which he had slept since coming aboard. But there certainly had been a blanket of sorts—half a dozen gunny-bags sewn together into a construction as pliable as a teak plank and as soothing as a shirt of Nessus.

Rhys suddenly began to curse, and his cursing was by way of being an education. He went far and deep into the remoter ancestry of Deep-water Dick, the boarding-house keeper. He ramified extensively, touching on the character, disposition and general unworthiness of Dick’s most obscure relatives. Dick’s mother, according to our sailor, was directly descended from Lilith herself, if her ancestry were, indeed, so respectable. By all the devils of deep water Rhys cursed that stock; he invoked the wrath of the higher gods upon such as followed Dick through coming centuries. It was a long, comprehensive, carefully thought out torrent of invective, and was not remarkable for vain repetitions.

“The sailor’s robber, the longshore pirate!” rumbled Rhys. “And”—a sudden change in manner

here, and the glimmerings of a sheepish smile curling his humorous mouth—"it's all my own fault, bad scran to it. Paid off with fifty odd pounds, I was, and there's a month's dead horse to be worked off before I can go aft to the slop-chest!"

His woes cut down his momentary elation by the knees, and he started afresh; but this time he cursed himself. Then he took up the articles one by one and subjected them to a very close examination, which gave him but little added comfort. The frayed and shameful corsets he decided to hang up on his bunk bulkhead, to remind him of his earlier loves, he said; the carpet slippers he donned at once, and studied them gloomily.

"I'll look a bonny bunch of blethers runnin' the Eastern down in these!" was his bitter comment.

Frederiksen, the Finn, warmly clad in four suits of underclothing, on his own confession, with two shirts in addition, and a "lammy" shirt as thick as a board over all, booted in those very beautiful and pliable sea-boots which the Finns affect—boots, these, as soft as a woman's glove and as watertight as a motor tyre—smoked a squeaking pipe and watched the operations in the intervals of darning a pair of sea-boot stockings.

"Come, now, Dobroff, be a sportsman," said Rhys, with appeal in his voice. "I don't know what sort of an outfit you've gotten, but swap with me as we stand, like a man." The Finn shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"No savvy," he remarked.

"Oh, all right, me parley the double Dutch-o, ye square-headed stodge, you! You likee changee for changee, eh? The blackee the goose, the whitee the monk. Savvy that, you travelling slop-chest, you? Here—'shun! You likee my clobber, eh? I muchee likee yours."

Frederiksen looked with simple bewilderment on his broad, homely face. "No savvy," he repeated,

and Rhys danced wildly up and down before him, shaking his fists in his face. The current of his mercurial wrath was switched at once towards the Finn. He called him all he had called Dick, the boarding-house keeper, and more.

“Time was,” he asseverated, “when no right-thinkin’ Britisher would sail shipmates with a Finn. What right have you aboard a limejuicer? Stealing the bread from honest Britishers’ mouths, that’s what you’re doing! Making us sail for three pounds a month, instead of thirteen, you!”

“Ah come to make-it the moneys,” said Frederiksen thickly and laboriously, speaking as one afflicted with eternal adenoids. “No good money my country ships. I gotta leedle gal, bimeby she mein frau. Ah buy soft-wood schooner—go skipper.” He bent again to his darning.

Rhys forgot the paucity of his outfit in this new channel that had opened up. He implored us spectators to bear witness to the rotten luck that compelled clean, white British sailormen to maintain the entire female population of Finland in luxurious ease. His arguments were entirely without coherence, utterly irrational, but here and there he touched on points that had weight behind them. He blamed the parsimonious shipowners who betrayed their own countrymen to virtual slavery and penury in the sacred name of economy and dividends, who cut down wages to the irreducible minimum, well knowing that if the meagre scale of pay failed to attract Britons there would be countless volunteers from the mixed nations invariably classified as Dutchmen or Dagoes in the simple parlance of the sea. For there are few distinctions made amongst the nations by your deep-water shellback. Anyone hailing from north of Brest is a Dutchman, as anyone hailing from the Mediterranean is a Dago. Chinks hail from the East, as everyone knows, and Lascars are coolies; but a Frenchman claims the distinction of being entitled

nothing but a "Frenchy," no matter whence he hails or whither he fares.

Yes, there was reason in Rhys's tirade. None but the British shellback of twenty-odd years ago knows how bitterly he and his kind suffered from the unpatriotic action of shipowners—men who openly advertised on their ships' gangways that "No British need apply." To me it is an unceasing wonder that Britain survived as a maritime nation. Our legislators did all they humanly could to take from us the weight of sea-power by manning, yes, and officering their ships with foreigners, who had no greater stake in the game than the desire to draw a higher wage than their own country's ships afforded. Scandinavian shipowners paid their men starvation wages in very truth, and sent them to sea in ships that were simply floating coffins—vessels condemned by Lloyd's as being entirely unfitted to sail beneath the red duster were sold to the Norse races, treacled up and sent to sea for a score of fruitful years—and the wage that meant penury and hardship to the Briton was riches to the Northman. As there was no language test, no suggestion of restriction, the Dutchman flocked in his thousands to take service beneath the red ensign; and the British shellback, in order to secure employment at all, was compelled to accept the shameful pittance that was accounted his due—even down to two pounds per month, and not a penny more.

In the ship in which the writer made his first voyage, out of a foremast crew of fifteen hands fourteen were foreigners and one was British. In the ship in which the writer made his last tramping voyage, with the exception of the engineers and himself, the entire crew, officers and men alike, was foreign; yet that ship was British-owned, British-registered, and flew the British flag!

And during the lately ended war it was the British mercantile marine that saved the world. Verily we

of the British race exist under a lucky planet, which takes no notice of our crass, aye, criminal mistakes.

But such deep reflections did not trouble us overly in the olden days. We didn't particularly like squareheads, because they were prone to work harder than suited our own convenience; in the light of their constant activities our own spells of loafing showed up all too brightly. With but few exceptions they were sheeplike in demeanour and encouraged officers to adopt bullying tactics; and sometimes, in bad weather, they scrimshanked and left the real difficult and sometimes dangerous work to be performed by the British element aboard. In many cases, however, we found them decent fellows enough, capable seamen, not addicted to that growling which is the Briton's prerogative, and of a generous, open-hearted nature that was pleasing in the extreme. Not a few of our foremast hands held officers' certificates of competency—there was even one qualified master mariner in the port forecastle—for a few good discharges from a British ship stamped a man favourably in the estimation of his own country's ship-owners, and the menial work at three pounds a month was considered to be well worth while by the performers of that work.

“You just wait till there's a war,” breathed Rhys darkly. “Then you'll see. We'll have British ships scuttled by squarehead skippers or handed over to squarehead warships as good prizes. Is there any Christian aboard this limejuice clipper that's got a dozen o' matches goin' a-beggin'?”

He caught Frederiksen by the sea-boot and hauled him from the rail on which he was seated, and for a minute or two a good-natured rough-and-tumble ensued. The Finn pulled himself up and retired to the forecastle. In a few moments, whilst Rhys still inveighed against his unfortunate lot, he returned.

“Ah gotta spare shirt,” he said, and passed over a soft, fleecy garment, washed better than any laundry

ashore could have done it, embroidered daintily down the front, presumably by that same "leedle gal" whom he hoped in the coming time to marry, and who would probably sail with him in his soft-wood schooner as first mate.

"Dobroff, you're a jewel," said Rhys. "You've set a good example. Anyone else wishful to join in a tarpaulin muster?"

It was the commencement of the second dog-watch, and with every stitch of canvas set, clothed grandly in bleaching white from scupper to truck, with the piled pyramids of power rising in orderly stateliness, the ship was romping along at a clean eight knots, the wind a point abaft the beam, and quite sufficient of it to make living worth while. Throughout the day the weather conditions had improved; little by little the brooding blackness to the south-west had lifted and vanished, to leave a vividly clear horizon and a pale blue sky only occasionally troubled with mare's-tails. The sea, green-blue, white-capped in frisky loveliness, ran evenly with the long Atlantic roll that had its birth on the Newfoundland shores, and though the sun was set, there was still a sufficiency of light in the sky to make the drying decks attractive. Every available accommodation was utilised for the stretching and drying of salt-water-soaked clothing; oilskin coats flapped weirdly from the stays and shrouds; the spanker outhaul was draped with the skipper's gear; the mate's and second mate's depended from chest-lashings hitched from poop rail to boat-davit—the ship might have been a moving advertisement for a gigantic washing day.

Yes; it was good to be alive on such an evening. The ship's riotous movements had eased to a long, even swinging roll that sent the lofty trucks arching sedately across the grey-blue sky in orderly curves; only occasionally did the finished gale give evidence of its recent being in a quick, ragged sea

that caused the bowsprit to dip and dive, to send a quick shudder through the hastening fabric, ere that same bowsprit emerged and swung its stabbing shark-fin point towards the clustered cloudlets overhead.

Lord! how we unconsciously welcomed the cessation of those blinding showers of spindrift. For a gale breeds a monstrous physical fatigue that is not thoroughly realised until the need for striving is past. During the fighting the nerves are keyed up to and above concert-pitch, and the hardships and labour are taken as they come, as necessary evils, but nothing to worry about unduly; once the strain is removed one realises the enormous efforts that have been made, the expenditure of strength, the lurking fear that has been overlooked in the pressing need for action. It is when fine weather comes that one understands the real brutality of the sea. For windjamming under old conditions was brutal, let those who defend it say what they will. When it is a case of saving a ship from destruction in sharp order, and work in a gale must necessarily be done instanter, men must drive themselves and each other mercilessly; human feelings are swamped beneath the dire need for vigorous, even vicious, labour. Men must work “all out,” expending that last reserve of energy which all men possess, did they but know it, and then finding even more as a final reserve; for the wind-riven sea is no sportsman; it fails to play the game; it drives a labouring ship down and down, and then hurls fresh attacks upon the shuddering fabric without letting up a trifle even.

No man can realise what powers of muscular strength and nerve endurance he owns until he has fought through a heavens-hard snorter; and even when that ordeal is passed he will refuse to believe that he has done what he really has done—the results of his frenzied labours appear incredible when viewed calmly, after striving, when the madness is over and done with.

And even when the work is done, when the furious, slamming canvas is reduced to something approaching quietude, when the yards are pointed and the ship is head-reaching, hove-to in order that she might safely ride over the towering waves; when, in fact, there remains nothing save to trust to the god of storms, ignored in fine weather, and seldom appealed to vocally, even when matters are at their worst, and to the weather wisdom of the captain; when all that remains is to crouch shivering on the highest safe part of the structure, with sprays sweeping you and the merciless wind clawing and tearing as if determined to snatch you from your holding as a trifling plaything—the sheer fatigue continues. The drive of a ninety-mile an hour wind wearies muscle and mind alike and breeds a pettishness hard to describe; the evil movements of the hull are jading in the extreme; the muscles, tautened for many hours, become flabby; the body's middle seems to dissolve into water. It is so with the foremast hands, on whom rests no weight of responsibility; imagine, then, the sheer tiredness of those who carry in their own skilled hands the entire well-being of the ship; whose minds are strained to breaking point as well as their bodies; and who, drooping with fatigue, yet must keep those minds alert and ready to cope with every fresh development as it threatens, or occurs without a shadow of previous warning!

But what of it? Good times had come again, and, with the resilience of youth, we gentlemen rope-haulers had ridded ourselves of our aches and pains, in one sound watch below; and now it was the sacred second dog-watch when, by the law of the sea, only the ship's necessary work need be done; when the hands may give themselves up to such enjoyment as the narrow limits of a ship afford.

We of the starboard watch had cleaned out the half-deck during the first dog-watch; we had swabbed the swilling floor and slung a few bucketfuls of crisp

sea-water here, there, and everywhere to remove the accumulated grime; we had opened skylight and ports and door to let God's good wind search out the dampest corners; and now, officially on duty, we were seeking for recreation. In Rhys we had a whole fund.

“A tarpaulin muster, that's the ticket,” he said. “Who's goin' to be the fairy godfather to this chicken?”

Had he been differently situated, had he owned a chestful of clothes, he would ungrudgingly have shared them with any less fortunately bestowed; and the brotherhood of the sea was strong within us. Very seldom do you find real meanness amongst those who use blue water; an open-handed generosity that is almost reckless usually characterises those who have sailed under the red ensign. It is an excellent thing—at sea. Ashore it rather handicaps a man; it is so easy to take advantage of a sailor! But we were afloat, and there was nothing to dry up our generous impulses. Slumgullion, Ginger, and myself trooped aft and busied ourselves with chests and sea-bags; we voyaged forward again, bearing gifts, which Rhys accepted without any outward display of fulsome thanks, but with real jocular gratitude. Long before the voyage was terminated we ourselves would be sadly in need of the gear we gifted so lavishly, but that would be time enough to worry; meanwhile, we had more than enough to keep us going, and anyone less fortunately placed than ourselves was welcome to his share. Ginger led the offertory with a magnificent pilot-cloth overcoat reaching to the heels—a bran-new garment, never worn. We seniors, who had during the last spell ashore made predatory visits to all male relatives for worn-out clothing of every description, passed over strong cloth garments, boots, shirts, bran-new Jaegar underwear, and even love-dictated gifts that meant, had we but known or cared, long evenings

of patient sewing, when the dear eyes often became blinded with pitying tears as the cruel wind raged and bellowed around the houses that were our homes.

Slumgullion, whose relatives insisted that he should voyage *de luxe*, contributed a pair of superfine linen sheets, cut to ship's bunk size—not that Rhys might lie in luxury, but in order that the bed linen might be cut up and fashioned into a suit of oilskins. And when we ran the Easting down, during that bitter period of ice-cold sprays and following winds, when the straggling icebergs lay to windward and sent their chilling breath home on the hurrying spindrift's crest, Rhys's oilskins were a byword for dryness and efficiency: wonderful garments, as soft as silk and as tight as a bottle. So, as Slumgullion's linen sheets permitted a thorough-going British shellback to endure without unnecessary discomfort, and as, further, they probably saved Rhys's life, it may be that his relatives, if they knew the truth, would not show resentment at the fashion of their disposal, or regret that the lad to whom they belonged did not lie in luxury o' nights. Though whoever heard of a sailorman worthy the name who lay between sheets? It is only when you attain the giddy height of command that you bed down so snugly—or when you throw up seafaring and go in steam! In sail, blankets are all that are necessary; no matter if they do get a bit damp, they don't strike chill to the marrow as you turn in between them; and—another great consideration—lacking sheets, you save on your washing bills in port, and when your pocket-money is limited every threepence counts.

Long before seven bells Rhys was in a fair way to own as bulky and complete an outfit as any man aboard. Already he had ferreted out worn light canvas sufficient to clothe him in working pants and jackets, and as he was as handy as a woman with his needle it promised to be no great time until he

possessed two or three suits of this type. He was very like young Squeers—everything fitted him. Such boots as were too small in reality he slit here and there cunningly, and wore them until they were rags and tatters. Trousers that might have clothed a giant he cut down to fit his own diminutive limbs, and a shameful blue serge suit that was pooled along with other details as being fit only for shipboard use, blossomed forth in the first port we reached as his best go-ashore rig, pressed neatly, cleaned, and darned with such microscopic scrupulousness that only the closest inspection could reveal that it was anything but a bran-new suit. There are no limits to the handiness of the deep-water shellback of the older type.

Nor did the lack of a bed trouble this salt-water Musketeer. Failing the stereotyped “donkey’s breakfast” (a rough mattress stuffed with straw), he had recourse to bread-sacks, which he won from the steward by making that simple-hearted half-caste a cunning model of a ship, masts, rigging and sails all complete, inside a medicine bottle; and the sacks he stuffed with carefully teased-out ropeyarn and oakum, until he made a bed fit for a princess to lie on. All this took time, of course; but as Rhys truly said: “It might be another eighteen months before he fell again into the boarding-housekeepers’ hands, and anything might happen in that time.”

Between us we scraped up a few boxes of matches—precious things in a windjammer—and so completed our tribute. We asked for no return; but we got a handsome reward, for we enlisted Rhys as our friend, and laid open his inestimable stores of nautical wisdom for our own special behoof. What we learned from him in regard to wire-splicing, square sennit making and the honours’ accomplishments of the sea cannot well be told of in words. He took us under his capable wing and taught us, from sheer gratitude, more than we would otherwise have learnt

in a lifetime. I think the shipowners must have had Rhys in mind when they wrote in our indentures their obligation to teach us the whole duty of a seaman; for only by that sailor's good grace did we learn our craft.

And, more than that, Rhys told us yarns. Some of these may crop up as the narrative proceeds: they were plain tales of the sea, crisply, sometimes humorously, told; utterly incredible yarns in the main—to all who do not know the sea—but perfectly truthful in reality, and erring on the side of under-drawing rather than over-drawing. The man had crowded more out-of-the-way experiences into his forty-odd years of life than would have satisfied even a dozen averagely adventurous men. He had not sought adventure, it had been thrust upon him; he had drifted on his destined tide and had washed up on strange shores. His right foot was almost toeless—he had suffered frostbite in the Arctic, what time the Greenland whaler he was boat-steerer of was nipped and lost in the grey-blue ice, and such hands as were saved were adrift on the floes for three clear months before being picked up by a Norwegian discovery ship.

He had the scar of a bullet-wound in his thigh—where a bucko Yankee mate's pistol bullet had winged him: "I hit him with a setting-fid for that, and took on his job," he interpolated—and throughout that livelong voyage he kept us excitedly entertained by terrific accounts of life as lived aboard hard-case Yankee hell-ships, where the only law is the law of the strong hand, and he who would combat that law must prepare to wager his own dear life on the issue.

He had been wrecked on the Diego Ramirez, westward of Cape Horn; he had been ice-locked in the Antarctic; he had poached pearls in the South Seas and looted sacredly-preserved Russian seal-rookeries in the wind-swept Pribiloffs; he had sailed more than one voyage as a blackbirder under that

notorious South Sea Captain Morgan, who ranks as a good second to Bully Hayes of infamous memory.

But to-night, as the light faded and the steely stars came out in glittering galaxy, as the ship ran smoothly with gurgling scuppers and the frap-frap of loose reef-points on the swelling canvas; as the high-arched sails volleyed and boomed and roared to the strenuous thrust of that good fair wind, it pleased him to discourse of that historical personage known to all sailormen of a past generation as Paddy West.

Rhys had carried our offerings below to his bunk; but apparently the lighted fore-castle had no particular attractions for him: he could neither read nor write, although he had a working smattering of half a dozen languages from Italian to Chinese; and the rest of his messmates were making efforts to understand one another's tongues or indulging in "sailors' pleasures."

"He was a nib of a lad, old Paddy West," he told us, as we fell into line and paced the deck from the main fife-rail to the forepart of the half-deck, where the capstan bars were cleated. Our skipper did not believe in the gentlemen rope-haulers associating with the fore-castle hands, mark you—although it was from them we learned our trade! So it was necessary to keep out of sight of the poop, and to talk in subdued voices.

"It was after the first big gold-rush to Californy that he got goin' good and strong. A Liverpool man he was—there weren't many flies on Paddy. Sailors couldn't be got for love or money—ships' crews deserting whenever they got within three thousand miles of the Sacramento. There was ships by the million tied up there on the West Coast, rottin' at their moorin's all for want of crews, who'd gone gold-diggin', after the fashion of sailormen. Such as was to be got in ports near home either stowed away on America-bound ships or signed on an' skinned out. So what does Paddy West do but

set to work to make sailormen! He'd make a deep-water man out of a pair of dungaree pants an' a brush or two of paint, would that same Paddy. Gardeners was his prime raw material, in a manner of speakin'. But bless you! it didn't matter to him what a man was in his beginnin's; coal-heavers, sewin'-machine agents—anything was right. 'Twas Paddy West that shipped a hatter's apprentice aboard a full-size steamer as second engineer!

"Oh, he trained 'em. When he got a man he sent him up to the garret to furl the window-blinds.

" "'Tis that way ye'll go aloft off of Cape Horn in an Arctic blizzard,' he'd say, 'to stow the moon-scrapers, skyrakers and heavens' disturbers. There's no difference in it, at all, at all. A gintleman's loife 'tis; wid nothing to do but lie on yer back an' gaze at the stars goin' by, but ye must watch yer work, ye must watch yer work. Come down now an' I'll tache ye to put a throat-seizin' on a duck-egg.'

"Then he'd give them a course of helmsmanship. In his backyard he had the steering wheel of an old timber-drogher fastened to the wall; and on top of that wall Paddy would sit with a brimful bucket of cold water near to his hand.

" 'Port a bit,' Paddy said, and told the learner how he should behave accordin'. 'Starboard a bit,' says Paddy, an' 'Steady yer helm,' he says; an' just as the misfortunate dryland shellback was gettin' the hang of things: 'Hard up yer hellum,' says Paddy, 'here's the father an' mother av a squall comin',' an' souse would go the bucket of water over the pupil, and, if he lets go the wheel or forgets to put it up, Paddy puts him back for further teaching. Then he'd march a string of them into the kitchen, where was a bullock's horn on the table, and round that table he'd march them as solemn as could be, three times or more; and then he'd halt 'em and say:

" 'Larn to spit sideways t'rough yer teeth an' walk wid a confidential roll, like as av ye were dodgin'

big says. An' av any first mate asks ye av ye've been to say before, ye can luke him straight betune the two eyes av him widout a blink or a blush an' say ye've been round the Horn t'ree times, an' ye won't spake a worrud av a lie. For it's round the horn ye've been this day, an' the mate won't specify which Horn ye mane.'”

“But did he really do all the things they say he did, Rhys?” I asked.

“You couldn't imagine anything that bright boy didn't do, in the makin' up of the British merchant service. 'Twas said he'd make a good boatswain out of a handful of used tea-leaves. And his wife helped him—she'd chase the sea-boys up the attic stairs with a mop, to teach them to be spry aloft; and she'd sling a kettleful of scalding water amongst them as they lined up at the galley door—that same galley being a hole cut in the wall of the kitchen—to get their hash.

“‘What's the good of callin' yourselves shell-backs,’ says she, ‘if ye can't dodge a big feller when ye see one comin'? Think of your hungry messmates an' watch, there, watch!’ And slam would come the whole kettleful of b'ilin' water amongst them, to teach them dodginess in hard weather.”

Rhys chuckled rumblingly, and sucked at his pipe; the good smell of Lucky Hit mingled with the clean sweetness of the gracious breeze and the biting tang of salt water; and through the half-deck port came the brazen bellow of the melodeon Crowther was striving diligently to play, with less success than unseemly noise.

“Put on your dungaree jacket, and then we'll have a rest,

For there's many a cold nor'wester blows, in the land of Paddy West ”

sang our companion in a mellow baritone that, rightly trained, might well have been a valuable acquisition to the operatic stage.

On Great Waters

"Sometimes the sailormen would question the outfits he'd give 'em," he went on. "Ye've seen the kit that bloody-minded wastrel of a Deep-water Dick handed out to me by way of return for my advance note? It's a princess's trousseau by compare with one of Paddy West's deep-water fit-outs.

"'Say-boots ye don't need, but dancin' pumps ye must have,' says Paddy. 'Ye've heard av the heel-an'-toe av the Atlantic—'tis a dance they dance in ships, an' that's wan way av spindin' yer spare toime. Where wud ye be widout yer dancin' slippers? Whin the weather becomes bad ye go to bed, av the mate doesn't see ye, an' lie about on Turkey carpets an' drink champagne wine out av buckets. But ye must watch yer worrk!' Oh, he was the boy to tell them the tale, was Paddy West, and they believed him—until they got their anchors aboard. Then they used to think out ways of cuttin' his throat without bein' found out! I've sailed shipmates with many such—good sailormen they were, too, but bitter—uncommon bitter against Paddy.

"One felly asked him one day for a belt an' a pannikin. 'A belt?' says Paddy, astonished-like. 'What do ye want wid a belt? Is there annything looks better round a smart young felly's waist than a good white manilla ropeyarn that shows him to be a true-blue British sailorman? An' pannikins, ye luxurious hound, ye! Pannikins, an' the cook t'rowin' soup an' bully tins overboard afore ye're past the Oisle av Wight.' That same man being bound from Liverpool to the Falklands, maybe, and scant chance of seeing the Isle of Wight that journey!"

"I'm surprised the men stuck it," said Slumgullion.

"What else could they do but stick it? Paddy filled them full of fixed bayonets and chained lightning that he called deep-water rum, an' they went aboard not knowin' but that they were goin' to their weddings. And the mates of the ships saw to the

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rest of it—the seven-pound-a-month mates that had the trainin’ of the merchant service. They got no credit for it, because they taught the trade as the fancy took them—with a belaying-pin or a fist, or a sea-boot, as like as not; but—they made seamen, when seamen there were none, and the shore people that turn up their noses at us sailormen didn’t starve that I know of.

“But when steamers came into fashion Paddy started in to train steamboat men. That was about the time of the Australian gold-rush, maybe, and the yellow-fever trouble down in the Brazils. The ships wanted firemen, and Paddy made them out of what he could get. Nothing was too bad for him to work on. He slung three barrels with the heads knocked out in his backyard and bought half a ton of coal; then he set his steamer firemen to walk past them and sling shovelfuls of coal through the barrels as they walked. They had to stoop, lift a shovelful and heave it without stopping, and when they could put three shovelfuls through the barrels as they swung from side to side, without touching the wood within, and Paddy all the time flingin’ buckets of water over them because he said they’d forgotten to trim the ventilators, then he passed them out as firemen well trained, and off to sea they went, and Paddy cashed their advance notes and looked out for more suckin’ Nelsons.”

There were many tales to be told of Paddy West’s rule; not all of them were seemly, but all were fascinating.

“But that’s nothing,” said Rhys, coming to the end of a real deep-sea “twister.” “Now, when I was bosun of the *Emily Nicholson*——”

“Weather main brace,” came from aft. “Lay aft, the watch.” There was an end of yarning.

“It’s my eight-to-ten wheel,” said Rhys, making towards the fo’c’sle. “Your fine big coat will save my life, Ginger.”

CHAPTER VII

A BREATHING SPACE

Now that fine weather had come our way the "calashee watch" scheme was discontinued, and life settled itself down to the even, monotonous routine that would probably hold throughout the remainder of the outward passage.

And it is surprising how swiftly days and weeks pass when watch-and-watch is the order of those days and weeks. Each watch in itself appears interminable, unless one is given a sailorising job to do; but Sunday follows Sunday with incredible speed.

We were beginning to settle down now; and we were fast forgetting our recent experiences ashore, except as misty memories. But something cropped up to bring back recollection of the days of our holiday.

"You remember what I said," remarked Slumgullion, "last voyage, about wishing to the Lord my father'd cut my throat before letting me come to sea?"

I remembered it well; we both felt the same. It was as we were working up Channel towards our home port, and we had been making preparations for making a more or less respectable showing before our home folks. Many months of labour had hardened our hands to the likeness of leather; lack of fresh water had prevented our performing frequent ablutions; handling a lot of tar and paint—we had painted with swabs of oakum because the supply of brushes had run short—had grimed us unspeakably, but, with the prospect of an early hiatus in our toil, we made concession to the decencies by endeavouring

to get our hands into something approaching the standard set by shore people. We had visions of tea-parties where would be pretty girls on whom a real live sailor could make an impression and to whom we should be objects of awe and admiration by virtue of the dangers we had passed; but—our tar-stained, stubby-fingered hands, which looked bad enough when emerging from the sleeves of rusty dungaree jackets, would appear infinitely worse when protruding from snow-white linen cuffs such as our mothers would insist on our wearing.

So we had recourse to many devices: we washed in paraffin when we could steal it; we used the contents of the cook's slush-casks lavishly, thus arousing his ire—for the slush is a cook's perquisite, just as "shakings" bring money to the first mate's pocket—and when even these remedies failed to whiten and soften our paws we went further—to the extent of making poultices of broken biscuit and the fragments of our "rooties," into which poultices we slipped our hands and endured the heat for watch after watch below. So we whitened our hands and made them beautiful; and—on the day we picked up the pilot the mate ordered us aloft, with pots of horrible coal-tar to black down! It was a bit of deep-water spite: a sort of protest against our affectation, I suppose; but it wounded us deeply, for it meant that we should go ashore with hands as bad as ever, if not worse. Which we did—though, when I come to think of it in the light of later years, our tarred fingers were perhaps the smallest of our defacements, for we had sold most of our clothing when in Valparaiso to buy food, and I went home in dungaree pants, a uniform jacket and clumping sea-boots that were white as snow through many drenchings in the salt waters of half the world.

Slumgullion and I had solemnly vowed never by any chance to go to sea again. Better to frowst in a solicitor's office, better to matriculate and qualify

in medicine, we said—these being the careers our parents had mapped out for us before the sea-fever caught us in its grip—than to continue afloat and endure such small-souled tyranny. Better even to sweep a crossing or go labouring as a hod-carrier!

"Well, I had quite made up my mind that I'd finished with the sea," Slumgullion said. "It wasn't what it was cracked up to be by a long chalk. And all the way in the train I kept saying to myself: 'Now's your chance—you can back out; it isn't too late.' And when the train got to the station there was my pater to meet me; and the first thing he said after we'd shaken hands was: 'Well, do you like it, really?'"

"Mine said the same," I put in. "Then he asked me if anybody I knew had seen me, and when I said no he smuggled me into a cab and drove me home through the back streets. Lord! wasn't I a sight!"

"What did you tell your pater, when he asked?"

"What did you tell yours?" I countered evasively.

"I said it was a jolly fine life and that I wouldn't stay ashore for a millionaire's job." I nodded; this was my own experience to a hair. We had both vowed brimstone-flavoured vows to prove our earnestness, but here we were back again on salt water—condemned now to the servitude of the sea indefinitely, for there would be no second chance.

"And didn't I want to say that I'd give my back teeth to chuck it, just!" Slumgullion had regret in his voice. "There I stood on the station, with the salt water in my hair and those filthy hands, and vowed it was the only life worth living, and that no power on earth would make me change! I wonder why it was?"

"I know," I said. "It's what the writing folks call moral cowardice; we were both scared of what our shipmates—schoolmates, that is—would say about us if we swallowed the anchor after one voyage. And

there were a lot of people who advised my pater to let me go last voyage, when he was all against it; they said one trip would sicken me and bring me to a reasonable frame of mind, make me thankful to be ashore. It wouldn't have done to let a gang of old women like that say what was what."

"It would be pretty ripping at home just now," said Slumgullion. And there was all the homesickness in the world in his voice. "Last time at home I used to try to waken at four in the morning, just for the fun of thinking there was no need to turn out to keep the morning watch; but I always slept too hard, after the first night. What they say about old sailors not being able to sleep through the night, because of being used to watch-and-watch, is all tommy-rot."

Then we paced a while in silence. We were both busy with our thoughts, both of us knew an aching emptiness at our hearts. We were homesick—with that keener homesickness of the second voyage, which is to the first homesickness as night is to day. We knew what we were in for now—the glamour was gone, the silken sails were furled for all time. At that date we had not made the acquaintance of a certain writer who ought, by all the laws, to have been a seafarer—one Rudyard Kipling, the man who knows the soul of a ship and the soul of a sailor better, perhaps, than any man alive. But we thought as he thought when he wrote about having "Sent our little Cupids all ashore, and having shipped three able quartermasters now, whom men call custom, reverence and fear."

"All the same, it's not a bad life," said Slumgullion, with a splendid effort after cheerfulness. "Good weather coming, and if we pick up decent Trades——"

"And running the Easting down at the worst time of the year—with loose ice about," the pessimistic writer added.

Silence again.

"I wonder if that girl'll write," said my chum. "I wonder how much it costs to get married and start a house. I suppose I'll have to wait till I get a command of my own, though—oh, damn everything!"

It was the middle watch—too cold for us to bring our blankets out on deck and engage in a surreptitious caulk. We had tried, but the chill of the sea was in the air, and, though we coiled ourselves as snugly as might be in our blankets, we shivered and grew stiff and full of aches; the deck-planks were infinitely harder than they are in the Tropics, and we reluctantly gave up the attempt. Slumgullion would take the wheel at four bells, but meantime there was an hour and a half to pass. Ginger was keeping the lee poop, stumbling wearily up and down in his mighty sea-boots, afraid to halt in his perambulation lest he should fall asleep whilst still standing. The foredeck hands were coiled away anywhere—lucky dogs! Some of them would be actually turned into their bunks—all standing, of course, in readiness for a call, but still coiling down good sound sleep, watch on deck or no; others would be on the sea-chests in their forecabin; only one—a young Dane—was awake, and he was seated on the fore-end of the main hatch, crooning some weird melody of his native land that seemed somehow to hold in its deeps the sob of a breaking heart.

"A man's a thundering fool to go to sea as a premium apprentice!" said Slumgullion. "All he gains from it is the right to wear a badge cap and brass buttons when he's ashore and cut a dash amongst his pals and the girls. If I had my time to do over again I'd jolly well sign on before the stick. A chap'd save his people something then—now he's only robbing them. Look at me—my pater paid eighty pounds and spent lashings more on a swagger outfit, for me to do the job of an ordinary seaman."

Some inherent snobbishness prompted me to reply: "Oh, hang it, there's a bit of difference, though. After all, we are officers in the making."

"A fat lot of good that is. We'd learn more in the forecastle, and be paid for learning it, too. There isn't a soul aboard who cares a hang about us, or teaches us a thing, except how to wash paint-work and clean out the pig-pens. If we'd signed on before the stick we'd have learnt from the other fellows, and been paid for learning at that. 'Twouldn't have made any difference when we went up for second, either. All the Board of Trade asks for is four years' sea service, and a good reference for the last year. Doesn't matter whether you've spent those four years in the galley or whether you've been a Devitt and Moore midshipman; it all comes to the same thing in the long run. It's the time you spend at sea, not how you spend it. Why did you come to sea, anyway, Barnacles?"

Come to think of, it was strange enough. Why a lad brought up in an inland manufacturing town, seventy miles from the nearest sniff of the sea, seldom seeing open water, with no vestige of sea-traditions in his family, should have heard that mysterious call was a bit difficult to understand. Nor had my native town given many aspirants to the sea—all my companions were either still at school or decently engaged in professional offices, or learning the art of abstracting large sums of money from the public through the medium of honest trade.

"I know why I came," said Slumgullion. "It was through reading Marryat and Clark Russell. I wonder why someone doesn't write a book and tell fellows what going to sea really is. In all the books I've ever read about it it's just yachting, and having adventures with pirates and suchlike tosh."

"If anyone wrote a book that showed the ugliness of sea life," said I, "no one would read more than the first chapter of it. Fellows don't want to hear

what the sea really is; they want to think it's like what they think it is—all romance and fancy work; like the shackles on Rhys's bag."

"I used to think going to sea just meant walking up and down the poop—I always called it a quarter-deck, though—with a telescope under my arm, and having dinner with the skipper. I got that from books. And the only time I ever got out my Dollond telescope to squint at a ship that was passing the skipper borrowed it and forgot to return it. I say, talking about the skipper, have you heard his girl play the piano? I was at the wheel in the second dog, and she came up and asked me what was my favourite music, and I told her the *Geisha* and *San Toy*, and she went below and played both of them right through—it was topping. She seems a good sort—must have had a nice mother, I'd say, because she hasn't got it from the old man."

We were talking aimlessly, swinging from subject to subject, just as the ship's trucks swung across the jewelled carpet that was the sky. We were youngsters, our souls filled with inchoate thoughts, seeking to find expression and a solution of the many doubts and fears that harassed us, and there was none to whom we might turn for guidance! The skipper, our legal guardian, according to the indentures of our apprenticeship, was an awe-inspiring figure—feared when he was not hated, never to be approached unless one was sent for; the mate was even more feared by us boys; we completely lost sight of the fact that he was a human being. That he had ever been a boy himself was a thing utterly beyond our comprehension; and to have confided in him concerning those intricate problems that harass the mind of youth—why, the idea was utterly unthinkable! The second mate was simply a coarse-souled sycophant, who believed—we had his boasting profession of it—that life at sea meant currying favour with those above you, and that life ashore meant getting drunk and

fooling about with a lot of Dolly Mops—the frail fair ones who batten on his breed. He was a man with but few decent instincts, foul of mouth, fouler, perhaps, of thought; who could not understand the eager curiosity of an adolescent lad, and who saw in every girl a possible mistress. He carried the stamp of the worse side of the forecastle upon him—but he was the only officer aboard we could approach with even the semblance of familiarity! So we had to thresh out our doubts, our misgivings and our theories amongst ourselves, wandering around in concentric circles that led nowhere in particular, victims of every chance wind of impulse that blew.

But into our aimless existence, full of inquisitiveness as it was, had come a sobered forecastle hand, a man of cunning knowledge; one who baled out wisdom in most grotesque fashion; who taught unconsciously. Generally Rhys used his own strange experiences to point his morals and adorn his tales; but I know that his cunning acquaintance with life's shadows and pitfalls, transmitted to us under glowing tropical stars, or amidst the whirl and bite of a Cape Horn snorter, clung like glue and guided us straightly when the path was thorn-strewn and full of doubts and dangers. Peace be to Rhys's ashes, wherever they may rest!

"I'll see what Rhys thinks of that." "Rhys'll tell us," became our shibboleths in the after months, and he adopted the rôle of oracle as readily as he would have stayed up his afternoon watch below to see that we put on a wire seizing correctly.

I suppose there must still be many Rhyses under the old red duster. Their attitude corresponds, as nearly as I can make out, by comparing notes, to that of the old serving soldier who enlisted in the Army for life, and who took the raw, young recruits under his capable wing and licked them into efficient soldiers in their turn. They got no reward for it—once Rhys's outfit was settled he refused to take

even a plug of tobacco from us for services rendered, and when in port he would often enough pass over stray half-crowns for a feed ashore, when we were short of cash—they got no thanks, no promotion; their actions were not even recognised. It must be that they found some virtue in doing good for good's own sake. Or it may be that they were possessed of that seamanlike virtue of desiring to impart knowledge, which is a very real thing, because just lately, in that sailing "Q" boat, I came across other Rhyses who took raw, Navy-trained men in hand and turned them out as excellent windjammer sailors in something less than no time.

So we talked of a hundred things, Slumgullion and I—even venturing into theological matters—and swinging clean round the wide world in our yarn-ing: from Liverpool to Sydney, and back again by way of Cape Stiff.

Looking back on it now, it was very wonderful to look aloft at the swelling sails and to listen to the thrumming rustle of progress made by the ship. One of the old Aberdeen clippers would have been making an even ten knots with that breeze, but we were built to carry cargo, not break records; we were laden scupper-deep with "notions," varying from a new organ for an Australian city's town hall, to cases of wax matches; with one section of the main hold specially converted into a magazine for ammunition for the Australian Navy—and trouble enough that ammunition caused us, one way and another, for both skipper and mate were whole-souledly afraid of fire and the subsequent explosion, and they covered every ventilator and forbade smoking on deck within a fabulous radius of those same ventilators; and they took temperatures every watch, and generally behaved as men do who live on the brink of a volcano. And then, when we got to Sydney, the naval gunner who came to superintend the discharging of these explosives, insisted on having steam raised in the

donkey-boiler, which overhung the main-hatch, and his men smoked cigarettes as they handled the airtight cases; and he—the gunner—told us the stuff was as safe as houses and we needn't have worried our heads about it!

Yes, we were a cargo-wallah, flat-bottomed, broad of beam; but under the stars we were a thing of faery, a witchlike craft that might have been Jason's galley journeying outward in search of a new golden fleece—which was adventure. Always we had the sneaking hope that each dawn would bring us in sight of the real romance—we visioned derelicts with beautiful castaway girls aboard, or age-old hulks with fabulous treasures of doubloons and the loot from Spanish churches of the Main in their holds. But we were *blasé* enough to be certain that pirates did not exist, save in certain odd corners of the China Seas, which neighbourhood we were not likely to approach.

Though Bubbles firmly believed that the Jolly Roger was still flown on the high seas—penny dreadfuls accounted for that—and not so many days later we pulled his leg very successfully, when a ship with painted ports was sighted. Unquestionably, because of the sheer of her, and something solid and purposeful about her sparring, she looked somewhat different from the ordinary merchantman, and Bubbles—new-named "Chicken"—rose like a trout to a fly when he was told she was a pirate masquerading as a cargo-carrier, and that behind those painted ports she carried guns enough to blow us out of the water! He went below to his chest and fished out a very cheap and very nasty Belgian pinfire revolver, loaded it, and came on deck again, prepared for anything. Bubbles possessed sufficient ego in his cosmos always to visualise himself as the central figure of any incident that might happen; and I have watched him unobserved and seen, from the back-throw of his head and the swift flash of his eyes, that in his splendid mind he was repelling boarders or

discovering new continents in his own "death-or-glory" way. Well, he found all the glory that one man could desire the other day; and when he was blown overboard from his sailing "Q" boat by reason of a German "mouldy" in his magazine, and when he swam back through the froth and the wreckage and fought a gun practically alone until he sank the U-boat, he was central figure enough, in all conscience. His one desire in life was to win a V.C., and he did it nobly—better than many have been won; but when he discussed this sacred dream of his he never took the actual winning of the decoration into account, but always saw further: to the ceremony of receiving the Cross at his Sovereign's hands; to the cheering crowds and the braying bands. And as it happened, it was his mother who received the Cross on his behalf, Bubbles having been called to figure in another rôle meantime.

There is no pleasure on earth, I think, to compare with a quiet night aboard a windjammer. With a steady breeze to fill every stitch of canvas, with just enough of an even swell to set the trucks swinging across the stars, with the rustle and splash and lilting "hoosh-hoosh" of broken water overside, the occasional soft creak of a parral against the mast, or the drumming frap of a rope to blend into one soothing chorus of placid progress, one realises beauty. There is no shuddering throb of driven engines; no suggestion of thrusting, vulgar striving; no stench of oil and steam; no blinding, irritating showers of clinker from the belching funnel; the feet pass lightly over smooth-scrubbed planking, and a man breathes his lungs full of God's sweetest air. And the mind, aloof from the clamour of a workaday world, strays wildly through all the known dimensions and frets itself against the confining bars of many that are unknown; the eyes follow the blazing stars which do not lie on a flat plane at all, but which possess as distinct a perspective as a shore-view, and somehow

it seems as though the eager, ignorant heart is lifted bodily through the pulsing void to somewhere not far distant from the footsteps of the Throne itself.

And so, as silence fell between my watchmate and myself, as in our own inchoate fashion we probed into those dazing problems of life and immortality, and death and the reason why we were ourselves, capable of thinking our own thoughts and dreaming our own dreams, we of a sudden drew nearer together, with hand grasping arm, and hearts beating a little quicker than their wont, for there, on the port bow, something shimmering and ghostlike, something that gleamed with a pallid phosphorescence that might have been a corpse-light, climbed monstrously from the sea and towered high and higher, as though about to overwhelm the bustling fabric in a horrid doom.

Forty feet high that shapeless shape upreared; it seemed as though it would never discontinue its upward thrusting. All we had ever heard about the sea-serpent raced into our brains; and for myself I had horrid visions of monstrous, "seeing" tentacles reaching over the bulwarks and plucking us, man by man, to cannibal destruction. Slumgullion told me afterwards that he felt much the same. We had been reading a book that out-Poe-ed Poe whilst on leave ashore, seeking thrills that the sea had failed to give us, perhaps; and our memories served us all too well. A chilling sense of helplessness caught me in a vice-like clutch; the knees weakened, and a wasping feeling grew about the waist—as if all within had turned suddenly to water. Not so long ago that same emotion reasserted itself, when a German torpedo came racing towards a spot exactly beneath my feet, and—passed beneath the ship's keel!

We were literally chained to the spot, unable to move for appreciable seconds. And as we gaped at that vision from the underworld of water, we heard a long, infinitely sorrowful sigh, that wafted towards us the vilest stench that a man could know.

"Grampus!" said Slumgullion, with adjectives as customary; and we breathed again as the big fish turned slowly over, like a tottering pillar, and crashed noisily back into its native element. It was only one of the whale species, up for a breath of purer air than it was accustomed to down in the deep-sea caves. Judging by that stomach-turning stench which was wafted across our nostrils, it needed it!

"Phew, what price carbolic?" was our cry. But the effluvia dispersed and vanished, and the clean, sweet breeze made all things seemly, and we were both very brave about what we would have done had it actually been a sea-serpent with groping tentacles capable of tearing a man, or even a premium apprentice, asunder!

Before we had simmered back to normal and resumed the customary trend of thought, four bells went, and Slumgullion had to relieve the wheel. Four bells always mean a bit of a stir on shipboard, for then both wheel and lookout are relieved, and the vessel wakens to a semblance of activity, which soon lulls again.

The late helmsman relinquished the spokes to his relief, with a growled statement of the course to be steered, and the amount of weather helm the fabric was taking; ambled over to the poop's weather side, where paced the second mate, reported the course, was answered, and then clattered down the lee poop ladder and so forward, with his pipe already in his mouth, and sheath-knife and tobacco plug in his hands, making ready for that smoke which is the sailorman's real alleviation whilst at sea. The relieved lookout walked aft and reported that he had been relieved and that the side-lights were burning brightly, and all was quickly as it was before.

Curious, this etiquette of a ship! There are so many trivial details to be observed, few of which are familiar to the landsman, many of which are quite unfamiliar to the man who has been trained only in

steam. It is high treason, at the very least, for anyone to mount the ladder of the poop to windward under any conditions—that is, at sea. The weather side is sacred to the officer of the watch, and the restriction was made, I suppose, to give that worthy specialist added dignity in the eyes of the crew; or else it dates back to a period when ships' crews were notoriously mutinous and apt to murder their officers and go off pirating on their own account. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that in a remoter age it was deemed advisable to guard against a possible armed surprise on the part of the gaol-sweepings and malcontents who committed themselves to the keeping of the high seas rather than face the wrath of man ashore. Whatever the reason, the result is still apparent: in the few sailing ships now in existence, no foremast hand mounts the weather ladder; and even when it is a case of performing work on that side of the poop he mounts the lee ladder and crosses over to windward as a matter of course. And when the captain makes his appearance on deck, the watch-officer, hitherto monarch of all he surveyed to windward, immediately passes over to leeward to give the ship's autocrat a clear gangway, until he is graciously invited to share that sacred planking on terms approaching equality.

In port, when sails are stowed, and there is neither weather nor lee, the poop's starboard side is the holy of holies, perhaps because the captain's cabin is situated on that side, and indiscriminate tramping overhead disturbs the sea-king's rest.

And any order given was, in the days of which I write, invariably repeated word for word by him to whom it was addressed. The idea of "Ay, ay, sir," is a familiar one, but it is not often that "Ay, ay, sir," is heard aboard a windjammer.

"Luff a bit!" orders the officer of the watch.

"Luff a bit, sir," chants the helmsman.

"Main royal, there!" bellows the second mate.

"Sir?" comes down from the giddy height.

"Overhaul that starboard buntline before you come down."

"Overhaul the starboard buntline, sir." So it goes on—every order repeated practically verbatim, to show that it has been received and understood. There are times when even a slight mistake in taking an order might imperil the ship, and it is as well to run no unnecessary risks.

But Merchant Jack lags behind his naval brother in many points of etiquette. There is, for instance, no saluting of the quarterdeck; there is, indeed, no saluting at all, except in those swagger liners that, by reason of their R.N.R. officers, model themselves on the Navy, and even outdo that service in formalities and observances. Though why a merchant sailor shouldn't salute the poop as much as the Navy man does, passes my comprehension, when it is borne in mind that the custom originated ages ago, when every ship carried a crucifix aft, and anyone passing the symbol, naturally doffed his cap. As, however, the shellback of twenty years or so ago hated the Navy with a most cordial hatred—a relic of the old press-gang days, this dislike, presumably—it is quite on the cards that he deliberately refused to practise any of his customs, which he designated by words that were the equivalent of the modern "eyewash."

Neither did the shellback salute his officers, whether ashore or afloat. There was no slavish kow-towing; though the word "sir" was used extremely frequently. Merchant Jack looked on his officers as necessary evils, slave-drivers; there was no bond of brotherhood between the two castes. This is not surprising. An officer seldom spoke to a man save to give an order; and as for taking any personal interest in the foremast crowd, finding out bits of their personal history, satisfying themselves that their food was properly cooked, and that their accommodations were as good as possible—that was never done.

And yet, paradoxically enough, a merchant seaman who had used the deep waters for forty or fifty chequered years would unhesitatingly run aloft and slide down a lift, risk his neck in a dozen ways on receiving an order from a youngster but newly qualified as second mate!

The men of my day were not educated, and anyone who possessed sufficient brains to pass for second mate, earned their—perhaps grudging—respect.

Not that the shellback was ignorant. He was shrewdly intelligent in matters pertaining to the sea, if something of a child when faced with the problems of the land. And he could single out the officer who had made himself by being promoted from the fore-castle, with an unerring eye—aboard our ship there was a very marked difference in the manner displayed by Rhys, say, to the second mate, who was a foremast hand in the beginning of things, and the mate, who had served as a cadet in Green's ships in their palmy days.

"I like to be ordered about by a *gentleman*," was a common fore-castle saying a quarter of a century ago.

But this is sheering wide of the course set out at the chapter's commencement.

Ginger clumped down to the waist at four bells: the second mate had graciously told him to go and "soak his head" if he felt that way inclined.

"How are things shaping up there?" was the natural question.

"The second greaser seems a bit narked, Barnacles. Nervous—though he doesn't strike one as being a nervous sort of individual. He's a dirty beggar!"

"Just sent you down for a smoke-oh, hasn't he?"

"Oh, yes, but—I don't know. He's coarse as they make 'em. He came over to the lee-poop and started talking about women—you know. Just dirt—and it wasn't necessary. I don't believe he's ever met any nice girls. Perhaps it isn't his fault." And Ginger

went into details that need not be discussed here. The second mate could simply not comprehend a clean-souled woman: according to his opinion all the sex were depraved; and he had whacked up crude innuendoes against the skipper's daughter, in whom Ginger already felt a sentimental interest. Our ship-mate's attitude to women was that of Sir Galahad himself.'

"I opened out on him, I can tell you," said Ginger. To the second mate it was probably as though a sheep had suddenly started barking! "And then he asked me if I hadn't got a fancy wench ashore—at home."

Now Ginger was hopelessly in love with some remote cousin at home—he had her photograph as proof. She was a very beautiful girl, and enormously rich, and Ginger was sorrowfully aware that his passion was hopeless. He was taking the second mate's materialism too seriously, and it was advisable to switch his thoughts into happier channels.

"Of course, he didn't know—he couldn't know—what sort of a girl yours is!"

That did it; for a clear half-hour the lad dilated on his fayre ladye's infinite perfections. And, aided by something of an imagination which came to its own in later years, it seemed reasonable to the writer to concoct a plot which had the removing of the barriers between Ginger and the lady as its main objective.

That plot was based on stereotyped patterns. It had to do with a bribed groom and a stinging nettle under the girl's saddle, a bolting horse, and Ginger, the romantic hero, stopping that horse's headlong career at imminent personal risk; receiving the swooning maiden in his arms, accepting her weeping thanks and the admiration of her parents, and ultimately leading her triumphantly to the altar. And Ginger took it all down like Gospel! With his wife's money he would buy the finest ship afloat, and I should ob-

tain command of her; or, better still, he would buy a handsome steam yacht, and again give me command, and we should spend the rest of our days on pile carpets, on summer seas, with lashings of the most succulent food, and champagne to drink by the caskful!

"She's really a stunning girl," said Ginger gloatingly. "I don't know how you think of all these tophole things, you know. It never entered my mind that we could do such things and——"

"And if that doesn't work, I could disguise myself as a tramp and molest her on a lonely road, and you could happen along just in the nick of time and give me the father and mother of a hammering."

"I say!"

"Oh, there are hundreds of ways to earn her gratitude, and gratitude is the first thing necessary if you want love to follow."

"It's gorgeous to be in love, Barnacles. But—I think a buttered biscuit wouldn't be a bad idea just now, would it?" And away Ginger went to the half-deck, to stodge himself on pantiles and margarine, and to permit the cravings of a capacious stomach to overcome the cravings of a generous heart. You could always break Ginger of a misguided passion by standing him a feed!

And so, tamely enough, the middle watch drew to its conclusion. The last half-hour seemed like a year inevitably; it was difficult to keep awake; train after train of dim thought was followed and abandoned—and still one bell—the warning to call the slumbering watch below—was not struck.

So I took it on myself to climb the poop-ladder and steal a glance at the companionway clock, and it was five minutes to four!

Slumgullion was hanging over the wheel as I went aft to strike the bell.

"It must be hours past eight bells," he hissed. "Been asleep?"

"No; it's not my time." The bell was struck, it was repeated forward; the long-drawn hail of the fore-castle hand arousing the watch followed sharply. Down to the half-deck I plunged to strike a match and light the thickly-smoked lamp—by its light to see Ginger, the faithless steward, prone on his back on my sea-chest, with his mouth wide open, and biscuit crumbs sprinkling him as the leaves sprinkled the hapless babes in the wood, snoring blissfully!

"Now then, you sleepers—show a leg—third time of asking, drat you! Just on eight bells—look alive!" Ginger aroused and groped for his clothes—he had forgotten it was his watch on deck.

Eight minutes after striking one bell eight bells was struck, and the watch tumbled out grumblingly, vowing they hadn't been properly called.

They mustered below the poop; a husky voice grated: "Watches are aft, sir."

"Relieve the wheel and lookout, watch on deck keep handy."

Ginger was first into his bunk, with another buttered biscuit to keep him company. There was just time to shred half a pipeful of tobacco and to indulge in a dozen whiffs as we drew the blankets about our ears; to heave a sea-boot at Ginger where he snored, and then—blessed sleep assailed our senses and carried us back in dreams to the homes we had discussed.

"The glass is tumbling down like h—l," growled Slumgullion just before he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

OUT ACROSS THE BAY

IT seemed unlikely that we should cross the Bay unscathed—such a possibility appeared beyond all reason. But the morning brought placid weather and a lessening wind, the sea was losing its briskness and commencing to run in long, sleek swells; and by night again the ship was heaving and swinging drunkenly in a flat calm, without so much as a breath of air to lift her canvas.

"Watch below, keep handy for a call," was the order at eight o'clock, when we of the starboardlines came on deck; and the word went round that real bad weather was promising. The captain's daughter, who had yarned with this present scribe during the first dog-watch, had stated that the bottom had fallen out of the glass; it was already beginning to pump.

"You'll need your oilskins before the night's out," she said derisively. "Wouldn't you like to be me—with all night in?"

"Wouldn't be a girl, even for that," was the natural rejoinder.

We of the half-deck were getting on astonishingly well with this sixteen-year-old girl. She was a born flirt, and, womanlike, counted all men—yes, and even callow youths of the half-deck—her slaves; but she was good fun, and seemed to take all us apprentices directly under her wing. She it was, we knew, who slipped a double handful of cabin biscuit into the bread-barge, when it was left aft on the poop at five in the morning—because, assuredly, the mulatto steward wouldn't do such a thing; he was

meanness personified, and would even crack a Liverpool "pantile" in two when whacking out our dole, rather than permit us to have one crumb above the allotted scale. Sometimes, too, quite unexpectedly, one of us, lying in an upper bunk in the afternoon, would hear a warning hiss come through the side port, and the next moment a chunk of cabin cake would fly inside, followed by girlish laughter. Even the skipper's prized cigars came our way—and during my last trick at the wheel, she had confiscated certain draggled items of my washing, where they hung disconsolately under the boat-skids, and behold, when I went below, there were two pairs of shameful socks neatly darned and folded, and—no word said!

She was a curious mixture, as the following months proved. After her mother's death she had been relegated to the care of two maiden aunts, whose hatred of the sea was colossal, only exceeded by their hatred of the sex which had diligently refused to make them wives and mothers. From what Gwen told us they applied themselves diligently to the inculcation of an equal hatred with their own for both sea and men; but they had inherited instinct opposed to them, for the girl was born at sea, she had been nursed by horny-handed shellbacks, and a storm was her delight. Still, the old harridans' teachings had some effect, and Gwen, curiously enough, was always trying to be good, and never quite succeeding. She had already been over the mizzenmast head, and she had cajoled the mate into allowing her to take a full trick at the wheel; and her greatest ambition was to go aloft in a regular snorter and bear a hand in stowing a topsail. Since there seemed little promise of this ambition being realised, for her father had his own ideas on the subject, she found a vent for her stormy soul in music; and many an otherwise tedious trick has she made delightful for me—all composers seemed to appeal to her; and she fetched more real music out of the old box of wires that was cleated

to the cabin bulkhead than many a famous virtuoso has fetched out of the finest Steinway for a half-guinea entrance fee. Chiefly she played Grieg, which is the music of the sea *par excellence*, and especially of the northern seas we knew. I have watched her, unobserved, endeavouring to concentrate her thoughts on some piece of feminine fancywork, or some educational volume thrust to her notice by her martinet father; I have seen her thoughts stray from the printed page and go roaming out across the glittering expanse of blue, as though to soar over mysterious Pacific islands, asleep amid their ringing foam-belts; and then return unwillingly to the book or fancywork, only to stray afar again, until, unable to endure that spiritual penal servitude, she would jump up from her deck-chair with a slam, dive below, and pour out her embryo soul in the wildest, most wonderful clashing of chords my ears have ever heard.

She possessed, in a peculiar degree, that ability to get deeper into a piano than the majority. Perhaps she was not an accomplished artiste; but I think the howling storm that heralded her birth had seemingly got into her being, for somehow, as she played, one always felt his thoughts swing away from peaceful seas to frenzy-lashed surges that rolled and roared and swung with a mad abandon that refused to know any bonds.

Poor Gwen; tragedy dogged her, so I later heard. On the voyage following my last aboard that ship, her father married her, *nolens volens*, to a wealthy Chilean merchant who was mad over her young beauty. He was ancient enough to be her grandfather: a blasé old roué; but he owned a fleet of fast coastwise liners which had a good name for pay and comfort, and he promised the skipper a handsome command in return for his daughter's hand. So they bridled this child of storm and penned her in a South American palace which was but one degree better than an Eastern harem; and there she drooped and

withered until a blond giant of a South Sea skipper happened her way; and he, believing sudden love to excuse all actions and to be superior to all laws, snatched her from her lawful lord's keeping and sailed away with her into the glowing West, where, let it be hoped, they found the glories that lie at the rainbow's foot.

But neither she nor we knew what the years had in store for her, and so, at the time of which I write, we quarrelled amongst ourselves for her tardy favours, and dreamed big dreams of possible mutinies that would give us a chance to shine in her eyes as the heroes we fondly imagined ourselves to be.

But Gwen's prediction that our oilskins would be required before the night was done fell short of the mark. Throughout the entire first watch hardly a draught of wind came from the invisible sky; the sleek, leaden surface of the sea alongside showed never a catpaw. Yet there could be no doubt that something out of the ordinary was coming. There was a strained tenseness in the atmosphere that spoke of meteorological apprehension; it was as though our section of the world were holding its breath in expectation of a staggering blow. Unconsciously we lowered our voices when we spoke to one another; if a laugh started, it subsided curtly for no apparent cause. The creaking tread of the second mate as he paced the poop was easily heard; occasionally a sail would thump heavily against a mast; there would be a slow rattling of chains, a thud or two, then again that brooding, ominous silence. Once or twice the impalpable mist that veiled the stars parted raggedly, to show a brief glimpse of those points of light, but their gleam was no longer glowing and passionate; it was thinned and enfeebled—as if even the stars were suffering from nervous anæmia.

The skipper remained on deck; and as my fate placed me on the lee poop, it was possible to understand his perturbation. Occasionally he visited the

chart-room, and through the side window I could see him studying the barometers—first he tapped the aneroid and frowned; next he turned to the mercurial instrument, worked the vernier thoughtfully, frowned again. Once he took a book down from the shelf and read it quickly by the light of the lamp, which frequently shot a long flame upwards—a thin flame crowned with a spiral of foul smoke, as if the lamp found it difficult to obtain air and was reaching upward for it. Later, when I visited the chart-room, I saw the volume lying on the table—it was a copy of “Atlantic Sailing Directions,” and was open at “Storms.”

“There’s something big coming,” said the skipper to the second mate, when he came on deck again. “I don’t like the look of things; that glass is lower than I’ve ever seen it, except in the China Seas. The bottom’s dropped out of it. Expect it’ll come hard from the sou’west when it does come.”

“Shall we furl anything, sir?” asked the second mate.

“Yes, get her down to tops’ls—to start with.”

It was not difficult work; the canvas hung lifelessly in its gear as we hauled down and clewed up: royals first, upper and lower topgallant sails in their turn, then the big maincourse. Just as we belayed the spilling gear of the latter the ship took a swift, heart-stopping roll; and it was as if the ocean had emitted a heavy, mournful sigh. Then an added silence fell on our little world; but—men had noticed the curious thing; they commented on it as they went aloft.

“Something big coming,” they declared. “It’s uncanny—feller can’t breathe fairly.”

By contrast with bad weather stowage the handling of the drooping sails was child’s play. Even Ginger was aloft, inexpert, getting in everyone’s way; but as willing as a dozen men. He shared with me the distinction of stowing the main-royal; and his side

had to be re-stowed some hours later—it took the entire watch to do it, and then the sail was in ribbons! He lumped about like a delirious camel, emitting curious exclamations which were curses invented by himself, and differing from all others.

“Oh, my great-grandfather’s false teeth!” was one of his objurgations. “Blister and bother the beastly gadget!” was another. I suppose they satisfied him as much as our more stereotyped anathemas did us. Having finished the royal, we descended, past the topgallants, where Slumgullion and Frederiksen were hard at work, to the mainsail. The great lump of canvas was furled in its turn; and, as we proceeded to the deck, I waited a while in the slings of the yard, looking out over the black uncertainty of the sea. From up here it was a possibility to see a curious, luminous shimmer underrunning the sombre general effect. The slowly heaving water seemed full of miniature life; sharp phosphorescent flashes glinted by here and there. It may be that the fish scented what the future would bring and were seeking the companionship of our arrested hull. To the north-east, it seemed to me, the sky was even blacker than in the other quadrants, if there could be degrees in that impenetrable gloom which held the breathless world in thrall.

“Doesn’t it feel funny?” asked Ginger. “I’ve lost my belt.” He descended carefully, holding up his pants with one hand, and even in the darkness I could sense his blushes!

To stow the forward canvas was as simple a matter as furling the main. Presently we returned to the deck. The ship was stripped for the fight, but her opponent had failed to answer the umpire’s challenge; the sky and sea were as still as though the last day had come and passed. Even the long swinging roll had stopped; we floated motionless, with simply an occasional choking gurgle from under the counter to tell us that the sea was still outboard.

The watch felt that great events were pending; instead of moving for'ard as they customarily did after performing a job of work, they trickled aft, one by one, and remained clustered under the boat-skids aft. Here they talked in low voices. Although the air was not hot, and though I had ridded myself of my coat ere proceeding aloft, sweat dripped from my face; my entire body was bathed in it. I went to the companionway to see the time, struck a match to consult the clock clamped at the head of the stair leading to the cabin. It was eleven o'clock. The glimmer of the match showed something beyond the clock's face; it revealed the features of Gwen.

She was standing in the doorway of the chart-room, looking out; and as the tension of the air had brought a tension to the nerves, I started violently.

"Scared?" she asked calmly. I indignantly denied the aspersion. To admit fear in the presence of a girl!

"Not that I should blame you if you were," she whispered. "I am, so's Dad. He says it will be a living miracle if we see to-morrow morning. Everything feels creepy—it's just as if the people up in the sky were getting ready to play 'The Death of Ase.'" She hummed the sad, slow opening bars of that mysterious melody, and, upon my soul, they seemed to fit in exactly with the suspenseful feeling of the night!

"You'd better stick to me if we go down," I said vaingloriously.

"Pooh, rats! You'll have to work—besides, I can swim."

"What time is it?" came gratingly from the skipper, who was aft by the wheel. "Stop that talking there—Gwen, go to your cabin."

"Just past six bells, sir." The skipper had spoken irritably; and every word seemed to contain a suppressed curse. He was feeling the strain heavily: he was face to face with as big a problem as ever he

had tackled. The whole Atlantic was his enemy, and it was showing itself in a new guise—it had laid an Eastern mark over its scowling face. Normally it fought something like a sportsman, openly, laying its cards on the table, even when it held a fistful of big ones—staggering the men whose trade it was to beat its bluff at the outset. As a rule, when it made its attack, it hit sloggingly, full in the face, obeying recognised laws. To-night it was feinting, full of subterfuges. It was none the less to be feared on that account. When an old pugilist, wise in every trick of the game, adds cunning and subtlety to his methods, the man who stands up before him might as well throw up the sponge forthwith.

"Square the yards, mister; let's be ready for what's coming," the skipper said.

"Weather main brace. Aft the watch." The watch were already aft, but the growing suspense was troubling them. No one started to "sing out" on the braces, and the yards were run square almost in silence. We moved and worked like superstitious folk in the ante-room of Death.

"See your tops'l halliards clear for running, mister. Overhaul the gear of the fores'l. I wish it would come, so we'd know——"

But "it" did not come. The breathlessness increased. At eight bells the ship was as lifeless as a painted ship, though a quarter of an hour afterwards the long swinging swell set in afresh, and she commenced to roll sickeningly. She gathered momentum as she concluded each successive lurch; she was like an electrified pendulum; almost she dipped her lower yardarms in the sea on either side; solid water occasionally swirled over her rails; but there was not even a flicker of foam to lighten the invasion; it was dead black water, foul-smelling, such water as might have poured from the mouth of the River Styx.

I slept fitfully during that middle watch below, contrary to usual custom, waking every time the bell

was struck aft, listening—listening. All of the starboard watch in the half-deck were the same; once, lying staring into the gloom, I heard a scratching of a match come from Slumgullion's bunk, saw his face revealed by the little flare as he puffed feverishly at his pipe; the match died away, leaving only the dull red glow from the pipe-bowl. Even Ginger, our star sleeper under practically all conditions, fidgeted and growled more of his self-invented anathemas. When sleep did come it was haunted by lurid dreams, from which one wakened breathless and sweating. Long before I heard of a form of torture designed by the Inquisition, wherein a man was imprisoned in a steel chamber with sliding walls and roof, all of which closed in on him by imperceptible degrees. Twice I felt the sheer horror that the victims of that device must have felt; it was as though monstrous walls were stealthily closing in. To be aroused at one bell was almost a relief—at least, a man could be out on deck and see what was coming—when it came. Arousing, I heard Rhys's voice outside the port. He was talking in low tones, and the usual mirth was absent from his voice.

"I seen this sort o' thing—out Sunda Strait way. In a big, full-powered steamer I was—bosun of her. There was seven-and-twenty ships went missin' afore it finished. Blow? You take it from me, shipmet—all the blows little old Cape Stiff can show ain't in it with what this muck means. Blow! Cripes! It blew that steamer a clean hundred miles astern, her steamin' hell-belt-for-the-election. Yes, inside a two-three hours. One thing about 'em—they're short, even if they're sharp."

This was not good hearing from a man of such wide experience as Rhys, and for once in a way even careless youth was impressed.

"It would be all the mischief if we went out," said Slumgullion, reaching for his sea-boots, which, as usual with hard weather kit when there has been a

fine spell, were anywhere but where they should have been. One of them was discovered under Crowther's pillow, to give the senior of the port watch added height. We dragged on our oilskin pants and lashed them shrewdly about our boot-tops; and the doing of it seemed ludicrous. It was almost impossible to breathe in the half-deck, though door, ports and skylight were wide open; and the lamp turned down to a mere flicker, out of respect for the eyes of the afterguard. The ship was perfectly still—the furious rolling had ceased. Only every five minutes or so did the canvas still set flap savagely, shaking the whole fabric; then a deathlike still reasserted itself. Oilskins and sea-boots under such conditions! Preposterous!

"She ought to be down to a goose-winged main torps'l," grumbled Rhys when the watches mustered aft. "When it comes it'll be without warnin'. And it'll be all hell with the lid off when it starts. There's some blame' Jonah here aboard—that blasted Finn, as like as not. Whoever heard of a Chinee typhoon in the Bay?"

The port watch went below; I went to the wheel, it being my trick.

"Watch on deck keep aft—on the poop," said the mate, in dismissing his own crowd.

"Tell the watch below to keep all handy," added the skipper, who had evidently not left the deck during the graveyard watch. The mate hailed the retreating men: "Turn in all standing," was his order. The rumbled chorus of "Ay, ay, sir," "Turn in all standing, sir," came with almost startling clearness to the ears aft. There were some queer atmospheric phenomena about right enough. As I laid hold of the wheel-spokes a thin wavering point of light showed for perhaps fifteen seconds on the starboard topgallant yardarm. It danced there—as I live, it danced like a sprite!—then it rolled saucily along the yard towards the mast and vanished.

"Dot vas a corposant," said the man I relieved. "Aind't der sea smell funny?"

He was right: there was a curious, half-pleasant odour rising from the still waters overside. It was like the tang of a tidal beach at low water, just before the tide turns. As if deep-hidden submarine caverns were giving up their secrets, indeed.

"Der course is sou'vest by sout'—she aind't steerin'. Hellum hard down—she go off against him," said the Dutchman. "I go take leedle smoke in mein bunk—den I sleep goot andt hard—I not know den if I drown."

He thudded away, reported the state of affairs to the second mate, who was stumbling up and down to leeward, and vanished. The skipper came aft to the wheel, stared into my face by the light of the binnacle.

"Oh, you?" he said. "Keep your wits about you—no sleeping now. What's she doing?"

"Not steering, sir—hellum hard down." He replied with a grunt, yawned hugely and stretched himself. He was tired; for eight solid hours he had been on a high strain of nervous expectancy, exerting all his knowledge—no small matter—to read what the hours would bring, seeking to probe into the sullen mystery of the night, racking his brains to be beforehand with the threatened storm. But, tired though he was, it seemed that he emanated a suggestion of safety: the near presence of his bulky figure was comforting. It was all right—the skipper was on deck; no need to worry. What his own thoughts on the matter were it was possible to understand a little later, when the mate came padding aft.

"Well, mister?"

"One thing about it, sir: it can't go much lower. It's dropped three-tenths since four bells."

It was the barometer they discussed, that invaluable instrument which is the sailor's very true

friend in time of stress, giving warning when the winds are gathering their forces for their onslaught, bringing hope when matters are at their worst; proving that somewhere beyond the swirl and sting of the gale bright skies endure and the placid seas of peace.

The skipper gave a thin whistle between his teeth, his foot tapped the deck impatiently.

"If it would only come!" he said. "It's the waiting, you see—not knowing where it's going to strike. The waiting!" His voice was almost a moan.

"I'm getting too old for this sort of thing," he mumbled. "About time I went in steam—no need to trouble about the weather then—drive through it, chance your arm, whatever comes."

"Might be something volcanic," suggested the mate, though without much conviction. "Submarine volcano active somewhere—it plays the devil with the glass. I've seen it, off the Japanese coast—when I was in command. Wasn't quite like this, though, sir."

The skipper waxed more cordial than usual towards the mate—maybe it was the natural snobbishness of the shipmaster which unbent at the suggestion of the mate's one-time rank; maybe it was that the lonely soul, bearing a too-heavy weight, yearned for sympathy and companionship.

"It's like nothing I've ever seen—it's weird. If it would only start!" They exchanged experiences, searching all the seven seas to illustrate their points, mentioning places that seemed to throb with all the heart-beats of old romance. The mate showed no disposition to go below—he understood the skipper's need by his own past service; and without ostentation he left himself handy, for the senior man to lean upon as he felt his own strength ebbing away.

"One thing about it—there's nothing much the matter with her aloft," he said.

"I'm not afraid of that—if the sticks hold. Hi, mister!" The second mate came briskly to the summons.

"Sir?"

"Get the upper tops'ls handed. And—yes, stow the foresa'l." I heard an approving grunt from the mate.

"I'll give you a hand," he told the second. "No need to turn out all hands—yet." And the order was given, to be followed by the hoarse rumbling of the great tackle-blocks as the topsail halliards were lowered away. The wheel was commencing to jar, shaking the arms abominably. But the air was still lifeless, stagnant as in a long-closed vault. It seemed utterly impossible to fill the lungs completely, always there was an aching feeling of dissatisfaction in the chest.

"Not coming up?" asked the skipper.

"No, sir."

"Ah, keep your helm down—not jammed, ease it back half a turn."

The hands forward were working more briskly now than they had done before. It was as if they sensed the approaching terror, as though some spirit of emulation possessed them; they would be beforehand with the storm. They "sang out" vigorously as they snugged the canvas; and though it was not possible to see them, yet one got the impression that they ran aloft at a nimble pace.

It was still black dark; the denuded spars were hardly more sombre than the sky beyond. And then, with horridly vivid brilliancy, as though a levin bolt had struck the world, the blackness was split asunder by a welter of searing, white-hot flame. It was not just an ordinary lightning-flash; the entire seascape was lighted up. A Gargantuan searchlight might have created a similar effect; for a clear two seconds every individual rope and spar of the ship stood out. I saw one of the hands—he was just scaling the

futtocks of the maintop; he had turned to look aft, and his face showed ridiculously plainly—the eyes wide open and staring, the lower jaw dropped. So wondrous was that fleeting light that the dribble of tobacco-juice down his chin showed astonishingly against the pallid stubble. And under that light the sea was glassy, unholily so, as though black ink had been mixed with oil. Then the darkness shut down with added intensity—I had not thought it possible to imagine so great a blackness.

“Ah!” said the skipper. “It’s coming——” What else he said was drowned in the thunder, that commenced as the near-by ripping of stout canvas grew in volume into a grating rumble and then came to a noisy climax with the effect of all the explosives in the world blowing up at once. Sound can be stunning if there is enough of it, and speaking for myself, I felt as if an actual blow had been delivered.

The ship quivered as though kicked viciously, then she subsided into tremulous quietude again. Now, if any man can feel the temper of a ship it is the helmsman, for she is normally responsive to his touch, as a horse is to his driver; and the impression I received was that the ship was scared cold. She was athrill with nervous forebodings; she seemed to be holding herself bunched up in expectation of an ordeal bigger than any she had yet endured.

The skipper walked sharply to the fore-end of the poop, and his voice was as an echo of the thunder-clap that had passed.

“Aloft, there—look slippery!” he bellowed. There was really no need for the warning, the men were working like eager terriers, judging by their cries. They had got the wind up, and all were anxious to be down on deck again before the first pushing thrust of the cyclone came.

Yet it held aloof cruelly. At times the seas are possessed of a bitter sense of humour. They are tigerlike in their cruel playfulness. They like to

toy and trifle with human souls before launching doom upon them. This was such a time. Another hour went by after that appalling electrical display, and nothing happened. The suspense was growing monotonous. From time to time the skipper came aft and scanned the compass, watching the lubber's line slowly swinging clean round the card.

"Watch her," he said after each inspection. "Be ready for it when it comes."

At sharp two bells, just as Slumgullion relieved me for morning coffee, another hideous lightning flash split the firmament asunder; vivid zigzags of fire outlined every spar, every rope almost, it appeared. The eyeballs were seared, so that for a clear minute after the flash had passed the picture of the startled ship was clearly imprinted on the retina. Followed another mighty thunder-clap.

"Don't be long," whispered my relief. "I'm scared cold." He only voiced my own feelings. Sooner or later a trial was coming, and I felt my lack of experience sorely. I also discovered myself praying that whatever was coming would hold aloof for another hour, until another man replaced me at the wheel.

As I slipped off the poop and to the half-deck a few drops of rain fell; mighty drops, indeed; each one seemed to inflict a shower-bath in itself. In the half-deck, hastily gulping down the acrid coffee, *sans* milk, and chewing at a biscuit, I heard the rain commence in deadly earnest. It was up on the table and get the skylight down as quick as it might be done; it was slam shut the ports and screw them tight, for this was as no ordinary rain—more as though the bottom had dropped out of heaven and permitted the stored reservoirs to empty themselves in bulk. As I went out on deck again the rain was coming down in solid cascades that beat on the head and shoulders with a continuous blow. And, if possible, it was darker than ever. The poop scuppers

could not deal with the deluge; the planking was already ankle deep in water.

"What price fresh water?" demanded Slumgullion. "Good old washing-day. I'm off." He ran squelching, and the rain continued to sweep down, still without even a breath of wind to stir it. It penetrated everywhere, soaking the stoutest oil-skins, drenching everything beneath, and it grew colder as it went on streaming down. It danced up in miniature geysers from the lighted glass of the binnacle hood, and by that light one could gain an idea of its astounding volume. As the human brain is limited in its capacity, I found the uppermost thought in mine was a hope that Slumgullion and Ginger would remember to fill our fresh-water barrel in readiness for the coming Sunday and washing-day! Then the thought came that in all likelihood there would be neither Sunday nor washing for any of us. Next thought was a sailorly memory:

"If the rain's before the wind, tops'l sheets and halliards mind." And if the coming wind were so stupendous as this heralding rain—well, look out!

The water streamed everywhere. A steady run was pouring inside my collar. If I lifted a hand to move a spoke of the wheel the arm was instantly bathed. It was more than tropical rain; it was all Niagara let loose at once, as though the ship had thrust herself clean under that impetuous torrent. All that could now be seen beyond the trivial halo cast by the compass lamps was the green sheen reflected from the starboard sidelight on the wall of pouring water. It looked as if a pallid ghost were waiting just forward of the fore rigging.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the rain ceased. Water gushed and thundered from every projection; it seethed and swirled about the decks, it gurgled from the scuppers. And the tremendous downpour brought no semblance of ease to the strained atmosphere. Still everything was calm and ominous—

broodingly ominous. Still the world appeared to hold itself in awed suspense, as awaiting the very crack of doom.

"It won't be long now," the skipper said.

"No, sir, it won't be long now." I could hear the mate's teeth chattering—with cold, not with fear. And then I paid no further attention to trifles, for something big was happening. I saw a curious greenish lightening of the murk in the north-east quadrant, and without an order rammed the wheel up. The skipper saw the spinning spokes by the binnacle light, and asked :

"What are you doing?"

I shouted—it was really a scream—to look—to look! Then he cried out something incoherent and snatched at the lee wheel-spokes, grinding the wheel up like a maniac. It was coming—more, it had come!

Even now I cannot clearly remember the whirling minutes that followed. Beneath that curious greenish shimmer was a fast-moving welter of white that piled higher and higher as it came headlong towards us.

"Is she going off?" bawled the skipper; and as I looked at the binnacle the lamps went out. It seemed as if the firmament had thrown itself in a lump upon the ship. It was at first a push, not a blow—a thrusting, persistent ramming. There was a thin patter of icy rain, merely a few stinging drops, and then the wind was about us. A ragged, clamorous sea was swinging high, towering its mountain peaks to windward. The ship swung over and over; a vast torrent of solid water slugged in over the lee rail.

"Binnacle lamps out!" I yelped instinctively. No one paid the slightest heed to that cry.

"Keep her dead before it!" shouted the skipper. "Hard up!" He was within a couple of feet of me, but his stentorian bellow was a thready whisper, no

more. Where we stood was now no shelter; we were exposed to the full furious drive of that astounding draught of agitated air. It hammered solidly, it rumbled and roared like no other gale I have ever heard.

One had to cling desperately to the wheel, even to hook a leg round the stanchion of the wheel-gratings, to maintain a footing. The ship remained wildly heeled over, with her lee sheerpoles in the sea; her decks—the pallid greenish shimmer that seemed the actual spirit of the storm made visible, threw a wan and unreal light—were slanted at a sick angle.

She was on her beam-ends; she was going over; she couldn't stand up against that horrific onslaught! But somehow her head threw off, the tense binding feeling of the fabric lessened, the wind came aft—a little more aft. The ship sprang up and leaped forward like a scalded cat. There is no other simile. She was afraid, and she scuttled before that devastating wind faster than she had ever travelled before in her existence.

“Keep the wind on your starboard quarter!” The skipper had his mouth close to my ear. “You understand—starboard quarter!” Then he raised his voice: “Hand to the lee wheel, here—quick!”

It was agonising work. It was wrenching my shoulder muscles apart. The wheel was never still. The ship was wild and uncontrollable. Hard up, hard down. I was sweating—in a very bath of sweat; my head was drumming with stunned amazement. The chief amazement was that a human being could still remain alive in all that elemental orgy.

The vessel was steering like a barge. That could be told by the changing slam of the wind on my back. Now it struck one side of the face solidly, driving the head sideways against the tensed muscles of the neck; now it drove bitterly from right aft; again it attacked from the other side; yet the wind

was steady in its general direction; it was the reckless hull that swung and cavorted, passaging frenziedly, as though in a death agony. Someone—Frederiksen—lurched out of the darkness and loomed clumsily near by, slipping and sliding, clawing at whatever offered a handhold. He fell across the saloon skylight, recovered, made a mad rush to the wheel, caught the spokes and swung himself to leeward. No word was said or heard. Perhaps he spoke; I do not know. I was tackling the biggest problem life had hitherto brought me, and had no time for outside happenings. The wind had to be kept on the starboard quarter—the starboard quarter. There was a steel band beginning to tighten about my chest, head and arms ached excruciatingly. It would have been worth a year of life for a moment's ease, just a chance to draw a decent breath and wipe the blinding sweat from the eyes; but one had to keep at it.

It was a wild fighting frenzy more than the conscious will that compelled one's actions. What was happening to the rest of the ship hardly mattered. She was unreal, phantomlike. Only the wheel and the wind on the starboard quarter counted.

Only once did I steal a fraction of a second to look astern. It was more than enough. The impulse to desert my post was wellnigh unbearable. Those high-towering grey masses, as high as the peak of the gaff at least, were sure to fall and crush everything with their monstrous weight. But the bellow of their fall, which from the spray that was flung with fearful velocity, that stung through oilskins and clothing as though a leaden-tailed cat had been applied to the protesting flesh, was evidently just short of the staggering quarter, was lost in the general confusion of sound. The world was a-riot with hideous noise. It was a savage combination of the rush of wind and an underrunning vibration of the atmosphere itself, that was distinct from the actual voice of storm, yet blended into it to make confusion.

It seemed as though some Titanic combination were beating drums the size of the moon all together; and through that stupendous din ran the incessant rataplan of millions of kettledrums as the sprays whirled and hammered on the ship.

Came then, as Frederiksen threw his mighty weight on the wheel, a thin, flickering quiver of lightning that ran round the sky, vaguely suggesting low-brooding clouds with ragged edges, revealing a floor of white, white-veined, white-crested on the ridges, white everywhere. Then the darkness fell again, doubly dark, for with the lightning had gone the greenish sheen that came to announce the storm's visitation.

And then the real thing came down on us. There are no words to tell of what followed. Similes are tame, unconvincing. Perhaps the whole Atlantic exploded in one gigantic upheaval; perhaps the sky fell bodily. I do not know. There were vast forces bitterly at war with one another, giants were battling all about, and I was alone amongst them. Even Frederiksen, at the lee wheel, his hands touching mine occasionally as we wound the spokes up and down, might have been in another planet. The skipper had vanished, torn from his clinging hold on the binnacle as though his fingers had been straws. Somewhere down to leeward, jammed hard against the rails, hanging outboard over the yeasty horror of the sea, were men—shipmates; but their fate did not enter my blinded brain. Blinded is the right word. It was impossible to think, for the stunning attack of the wind rendered thought useless. Instinct prevailed instead. "Wind on starboard quarter" was the last order, and it must be obeyed.

If the ship had raced before, she fled now like a hounded hare. She was up and down; at one moment her bow flung downwards, down and ever deeper down, and that lonely fragment of the poop whereto I clung seemed isolated in an eternity of yelling spite.

At the next there was a sense of suffocating immensity towering high overhead. The bows emerged from their imprisonment and flung up and up, spiralling as they went, and the deep-delved caverns of the sea spewed dreadful odours about me. It was necessary to cling furiously to the wheel to prevent being whisked away into the roaring infinite. The drive of spindrift promised to cut a man in two at the waist; but amongst many other pains and stresses this added stress lost a lot of its significance. It was the sensation of sheer sobbing loneliness that was hardest to bear; the isolated heart was crying aloud for companionship.

The touch of Frederiksen's horn-hard hand as it closed over mine on a spoke was more heartening than the hand-clasp of a trusted friend. It drew me up out of gulfs of abysmal depth, up and up to freer air and courage. But the man told me afterwards that he had never been so afraid in all his days. He was reaching out for the companionship of my fingers; and so two weak souls found strength in combination.

No one seemed to heed us two lonesome ones in the least. The binnacle remained unlighted, the skipper had disappeared. The ship stormed on at her headlong pace, with the wind always on the starboard quarter or thereabouts—the right point for a cyclonic storm in the northern hemisphere, for by running thus we should skirt its boundaries and draw clear without charging through the dreadful vortex, in which no sailing ship could live.

Then three-quarters of my senses were suddenly blotted out at the bidding of a stunning blow on head and shoulders; there was an agonising pang in the ribs, and the wheel disappeared into nothingness; blow after blow smote me, in the face, on the point of the shoulder, the knees, everywhere. Water was all about, overhead, underneath.

"Overboard!" was my thought. But the instinct

for life was too great to take such a blow in cowardly-wise. There was a frenzied, breathless struggle, whilst the heart stuck solidly in the aching throat; a savage reaching out for a holding; pain as the battered body struck all too solid substances; and then a quick rush of relief as the knees and toes scrabbled on planking. Not overboard yet. The ship had pooped, that was all. She had shipped a few dozen tons of the Bay over her wheelbox, and in its passing that sea had wrought big havoc.

I clawed aft again to the wheel, dimly aware that ragged timbers protruded where had been the cabin skylight, and found the staunch teakwood wheel sliced in halves as though with a giant razor. Frederiksen was still there. He was hurt, as I afterwards found, but he stuck gamely to his post, exerting all his monstrous strength—and monstrous it was—to control the panicked fabric single-handed.

"I t'ink I keeled," he bellowed. "Qui' right." His few words of English were unequal to the demand made upon them; but drifting through the hurl of the gale I caught occasional spitting anathemas in Finnish which seemed to consign ship and storm to the seventh hell.

So we endured, when to think of endurance was impossible. We hung on by instinct, our strained muscles obeying some other power than the bidding of our fatigued wills, some cultivated sailorly instinct, one presumes, that was bigger than the sailor himself. It was not heroic service, because it was not done consciously; but, so far as I myself was concerned, there was a sort of subconscious feeling that the ship must be handled somehow. Her destinies were given into our hands for good or evil, and we must endure to the finish, whatever that might be. Fear stood aloof, impotent. No fear were big enough for the circumstance.

Very slowly the blackness paled. The dawn was coming. The stripped spars showed visible against

a grey-black enormity that no written words may describe. The thin rectangle of the main topsail, high-roached and steel-stiff, appeared, a mere blur against the thinning gloom. White immensity showed dimly all about. The seas were lifted up to an unbelievable height, but as they towered the hurricane snatched at their crests and swept them flat again, tearing off biting sheets of spray that rattled over us like concentrated machine-gun fire.

It was a high, unnatural dawn, with livid steeliness showing wanly between enormous piles of black-brown, ragged-fringed clouds. The mouth of the atmospheric cave whence the gale emerged was vividly bright, but that brightness was weird and uncanny, unlike the dawn of an ordinary day. It was wrath in being. Across the patchiness shot thin clouds with unbelievable velocity, the higher scud racing at an apparent hundred miles an hour.

Little by little a yellowish light, that was more dreadful than the previous darkness, suffused the raging seascape. Impressions were received subconsciously; the handling of the ship demanded all our attention. But the memory retains a miniature impression of one huge wave that upreared itself in a trivial lull, when the wind dropped to perhaps a scant ninety miles an hour, that hoisted higher and higher, bending over to fall; but ere it crashed destructively down the gale increased in a squall and cut the crest clean off, and hurled it in rattling spin-drift from the quarter of the ship clean over the main topsail, like a sprayed jet from the greatest hose ever conceived by human mind. And another quick impression was of the main royal, that side which Ginger had stowed overnight. It was tearing itself adrift a little at a time and flogging itself to ribbons—a brand new sail, made of No. 1 canvas; for our skipper liked to pose as a bit of a driver, and he knew the tale would be told that the ship's flying canvas was made from the stoutest stuff procurable.

The ship scudded wildly; but it seemed as though nothing constructed by human hands could stand that magnified strain. She would run under—she couldn't endure. Or one of the vast seas that upreared in the fragmentary lulls would drop on the hatches and stave them in. She'd fill and founder; nothing could prevent it. She needed more canvas to keep her ahead of the seas, but her spars would not stand the weight.

Daylight grew grimly. The ship was fighting in a little world of her own, for the sea horizon was dwarfed and closed in by the everlasting fog bred of the spray that was everywhere. The poop was apparently deserted; but high up in the mizzen rigging a few limp figures clung like hanging corpses, shapeless and inert. The main deck was a boiling waste of white water, from which the top of the half-deck emerged like an island. There was a suggestion of nakedness about the ship that even her gaunt stripped spars could not account for. Her after boats were missing, that was it, which accounted for sundry smashing sounds heard soon after the breaking of the gale—sounds recollected now, though only subconsciously observed then.

The ship was plunging wildly, giddy dives that apparently could end only at the sea's bottom; but as she appeared to stand on her bowsprit a comber would swing beneath her keel, drop away from her shuddering stern, roll on and on, lift up the bow and send it stabbing towards the wallowing cloud-wrack on high. And so she would climb wildly up that watery slope, whilst astern the waters massed higher and higher; but as they poised to fall, down would swing the bow again, with a giddy, twisting, corkscrew motion, and up would go the stern to permit the aqueous menace to pass beneath without inflicting harm, though the jar of the tortured rudder was communicated to the shattered wheel and up through our arms to our brains as if definite hammer blows had been administered.

A face showed round the fore corner of the chart-house, which still stood staunchly, although it had been subjected to a monstrous battering. The drive of the wind lifted the sou'-wester from that face and thrust it back so that it stood from the head, held in place by the strings beneath the chin, and the features grew empurpled with the choking grip.

It was the skipper, grimed unbelievably, drenched through and through. His face bore the expression of a man awakened suddenly from deep sleep to discover the last day of judgment active about him; his eyes stared redly from his suffused face. He thrust his shoulders from their shelter, and the wind drove him bodily backwards. He disappeared. Then his head showed again, near the deck level, next his shoulders, then his entire body. He was crawling belly-flat to the planking, hanging to the bottom of the canvas cover over the chart-house, warping himself along an inch at a time. The ship increased her activities. He was assailed by white water that boiled about him as if he were a half-tide rock. He hung passively until the first weight was past, then he crawled aft again, until he gained the space between chart-room and skylight. Here he wedged himself whilst the fabric performed another mad Saturnalian dance. As her bow lifted giddily, as the sheer wall of water astern becalmed her deck, the skipper scrambled to the wheel grating and clung there.

There was virtue in his presence; courage that was evaporating returned, weakened muscles regained firmness, the wheel was not one-half so heavy as before. It was all right; the skipper was on deck. We leaned on his skill and sea lore as if they were tangible supports. How he felt, having none to appeal to, none to advise, only he himself knew. But for us, who had wrought through blackness, a dawn had come. We were not responsible any longer. Here was someone to give us orders.

Not that the gale had lessened in the least; if anything, it seemed to increase; but the down-pressing weight and savagery were out of it. All we need do now was to obey instructions unthinkingly, answering the bidding of the superior will.

He warped himself almost upright, clinging to the edge of the wheelbox behind me, looking here and there, aloft, for'ard, aft. Principally his glance rested on the broken wheel. Of a sudden he shouted, one hand clapped about his mouth; and some trick of the atmosphere carried his voice to receptive ears, for in a little while the mate's face showed round the chart-house, also suffused and ridiculous-looking. He scrambled aft, but half-way a sea galloped over the poop and swung him, sprawling and floundering like a learning swimmer, in amongst the ruins of the skylight. One biting curse reached my ears as he brought up in that grisly raffle.

"Oh, Christ!" he yelled. It was an involuntary exclamation, jerked out of him by the impact; but it could be seen from his writhing face that he was enlarging on his first remark, diving deep into his recollection for phrases sulphurous enough to fit the occasion. Savage conditions of life bred a savage turn of speech; nothing but the most lurid oaths could adequately have given relief to his overcharged feelings. Then he wormed himself clear; but as he staggered upright his face went suddenly grey beneath its grimy tan, and his mouth writhed to express the agony he felt. Afterwards it turned out he had broken a rib; but throughout the gale's endurance he made no mention of the fact, toiling on with unabated energy in his effort to earn his eight pounds a month. Presently he was clinging to the skipper behind me. Conversation was carried on in exclamations and disjointed words. Only salient words were employed; but intelligence spoke to sage intelligence, and the gaps were easily bridged.

"Handspikes! Preventer wheel. Must be done. See to it."

"I'll set about it."

"Send steward—grog here. Strain—daren't relieve wheel yet. Broach to at change. Savvy?"

"Savvy, sir."

"Topsail sheets—doubled. Carry away—ship goes."

"Better heave her to, sir."

"Can't—yet. Wait a bit. Get hands along."

"Ay, ay, sir." Wincing, biting his lips, the mate watched his chance. Spray after spray dowsed him, whole water swirled to his waist, but he apparently heeded these things not at all. He was watching his chance.

"Tell carpenter," roared the skipper, just as the mate was about to move up the deck, and swept his arm broadly to indicate the shattered skylight. Then the bow swung down, swerving sharply as a sea caught the stern. The whole fabric fought viciously against the biting of the helm; the wheel spokes, such as remained, jarred in our grasp. Frederiksen was lifted from his feet and flung high, booted legs in air. The jagged wreckage of the wheel drove me down beneath it.

"Hold her!" bawled the skipper, and flung his own weight to aid. When I regained my footing the mate had disappeared, as though swept out of existence by the drive of wind and sea. But that he still remained in existence was evidenced by a spasmodic trickle of humanity along the poop. Men drifted from nowhere in particular, tacked, scrabbled and squirmed towards the after part. One and all were soaking, and their eyes were red-rimmed and weary; salt was caked upon them everywhere; their oilskins were torn in dozens of places. One man's rubber sea-boot was laid open from ankle to top, and water, black and muddy, poured from the gap at every step he took. Rhys, quiet now, with never

a quick jest on his lips as usual, brought a hand-spike, and as though by common consent, took charge of affairs. When he spoke men obeyed his bidding as if he were an officer. Other capstan-bars appeared, and lengths of ratline line. The former were lashed across the still existing spokes of the wheel to give us at the helm something to grip. It was not easy work, for very seldom was the wheel still a second. It was an unceasing wild fling up and fling down to counteract the savagely reckless wildness of the ship's head as she writhed against the check and tore bitingly in the effort to free herself to run clean-footed to destruction.

"Watch her!" said the skipper. "Down!" He lent his weight. As the wheel thudded on the rudder-head another turn of the lashing was passed, and another; then up went the wheel again, men stumbling and sliding all about it, ducking to the smite of the seas, gasping and cursing, expectorating tobacco juice everywhere. There was nothing picturesque about it; it was sheerly grim endeavour without the surplus trimmings; but all hands were working "all out," calling on their last reserves of strength, and as an example of how sailors do work it was not lacking in interest.

The average manual labourer ashore does not know what a reckless expenditure of effort is as compared with the strivings of these ill-paid fellows, who had no union to support them in concerted action, who had no real pride in the ship, who simply worked because it was the sea custom to work until you dropped, and even in dropping endeavour not to get in the road of others who still survived.

The light was growing all the time, but it brought scant hope with its advance; rather it rendered the outlook more stunning. If ever God's anger manifested itself in concrete shape, it was evidenced there in that terrific sky, which was leaden-grey where it

was not smeared over with vile black clouds or shot by those livid steely gleams. To windward it was simply a huge cave, arched with brown-black, with tattered streamers depending to the white hell of the foaming sea. Ahead we drove into yellow sea-fog that gave to our advance and showed yet more sea-fog, with the fury-hurled waters running beneath. The skipper flung an arm round my neck—not as a caress, not by way of commendation, but simply to hold himself in position whilst his lips were against my ear.

“If you get her by the lee she’s scuppered!” he said, and repeated the word as though to add conviction: “Scuppered, understand? Scuppered! Watch your lee helm.”

And as he said it the lee side of the main topsail suddenly flapped once, with the detonation of a fifteen-inch gun. The ship was charging wildly; but somehow we ground the helm down and she came roaring up afresh, bringing the wind to the desired quarter, bringing it out on the other beam, indeed, before she lost the impetus of her swing and steadied to the altered helm.

“Watch her, damn you!” It was much fiercer language than that, but it stung our wearied bodies to fresh endeavour; and, too, just as I felt human frame could no longer endure the strain, the head and shoulders of the steward showed at the companionway. Normally of an olive-brown complexion, the domestic was now ashen grey, his eyes seemed double their normal size, his lips were widely parted in a grin that suggested no mirth.

“Come here!” yelled the skipper, and the man came, on all fours, scampering like a baboon. His shirt ballooned all about him until the frenzy of the wind tore it from its belt and ripped it in streamers. As he made a panicky run and grabbed at the skipper’s boot it was possible to hear the chattering of his teeth.

"Grog! Rum!" bawled the skipper. "Get some—these men. Savvy?"

"De cabins am full ob water, sah!" was the half-fearful reply.

"Damn the cabins! Get rum—plenty. A bottle. Where's Gwen?"

"Don' know, sah. Gor' lumme!" A sea towered, curled, fell, spanking the steward in the back. He clutched at me, his long nails scratching my face, failed to get a grip, caught at a wheel-spoke, lost it, and was whirled away to the lee scuppers, where he lay, sodden, breathless.

"Damned flunkey!" I heard the skipper growl, without sympathy. The steward picked himself up, danced along the deck like a tightrope walker, and shot from view.

Other things were happening. The second mate was up aloft with a party of men. They had to fight for every inch they gained, their oilskins blown fantastically over their heads. I saw them clutch the rigging and hook their legs about it when the hottest squalls drove down, and knew what they were feeling—the fear of being licked off like flies. But they gained the mainyard somehow and warped themselves out along it, clinging frantically during the worst of the plunges, scrambling a little in a momentary stillness, clinging again. They had coils of stout rope festooned about their necks. At the extreme yardarms they began to be busy, passing turn on turn of the tough cordage through the topsail clews and round the yardarm, backing up the chain sheets lest they parted, and in parting lost us the sail on which, under God's providence, the ship's safety depended. One man perched himself astride the extreme yardarm, riding the spar like a jockey, swaying to every movement. At one moment he was staring almost straight down as the ship rolled to starboard, at another he was staring uphill as the ship rolled back.

"She'll take the sticks out of herself," the skipper said. He yelled again for the mate. As that worthy failed to appear, he bade one of the men working at the wheel go and find him. Presently the mate came, with him the carpenter. Afterwards it was said the carpenter had slept through everything. No one had remembered to call him until the mate needed him. The mate found him snoring blissfully in his bunk, standing on his feet one minute, on his head the next. He was a Norwegian, a good man, but with the greatest capacity for sleep I have ever known. He treated the chaos on deck as if it were nothing much, but he wrinkled his normally placid brows as he saw what was required of him in the way of repairs.

"Mister!" The mate fought aft to the skipper.

"Set up the rigging screws—rolling—take the sticks out!" The mate, clinging to the wheel, shook his head. Water dripped from his big moustache, it streamed from his eyes. He had all the appearance of a walrus newly emerged from a dive.

"Won't start," he said. "Frozen up with paint."

"Hell!" said the skipper, as this news penetrated to his understanding. The ship was rigged in what was then the modern fashion, with steel stays and shrouds and steel screws to tauten them, not the older-fashioned rope lanyards, which, rove through dead-eyes, were always manageable. But coat on coat of paint had bound in the natural rust, and, as was afterwards proved, when we did start up those rigging screws it was necessary to light a fire around each one before it would turn.

"We'll frap 'em in across the masts, sir."

"Right. Get the foreyards pointed a bit."

Men were collected as they completed other tasks, and were driven down to the maindeck. The mate went to the weather fore-braces and stood there, ready to slack when the hands were ready to haul, but slacking nothing until the exact moment arrived,

lest the roll of the ship tear the braces from his hands and throw the yards swinging madly, until they crashed down and overboard. Water was constantly streaming over the hands; the men to leeward were up to their shoulders in it; but they hauled, and even sang out vigorously. Then the steward reappeared, with a black bottle stuck in the waistband of his pants. He shot aft with it and thrust it at the skipper, as though disclaiming all responsibility.

"You ——! You've not drawn the cork!" cried our captain. The domestic stared at him as if he had, on the sounding of the last trump, demanded hot water for immediate shaving.

"Losing your head, eh? Ne'er mind. Hi!" The steward was turning to tack back to cover. "What about breakfast? Eh, what about breakfast?"

The flunkey stared. He swung one arm in a sweeping gesture.

"God!" he yelped. That was all. Then he faded away, blown irresistibly to the wall of the chart-room, against which he was flattened like a curious entomological specimen. That men should even think of meals in such turmoil staggered him. He was deathly sick, so it appeared, and he was even more scared. The galley had been washed out; to light a fire there was impossible. There was small likelihood of cooked food for anyone until the storm abated; maybe we should never eat cooked food again.

"Damned nigger!" growled the skipper, and smote the neck of the bottle skilfully against the wheelbox. He clapped the ragged glass to his own lips first and took a gulp of the contents, then he passed it to me.

"Drink hearty—no harm—good rum!" he explained.

It was invigorating. Let temperance enthusiasts say what they will, it was heartening. It seemed to add strength and determination to the jaded system,

it lessened the magnitude of the seas, for a little while even the drive of the wind appeared to abate. The wheel, which had weighed like lead, lightened appreciably, the ship grew more kindly. When the skipper reached across and snatched the bottle from Frederiksen, who seemed intent on finishing the contents, I found myself laughing. The skipper helped himself to another gulp, and then carefully chocked the bottle off where it could not capsize.

“Better, eh?” he asked.

We turned to our task afresh with renewed vigour.

CHAPTER IX

PULLY-HAUL

AN hour later, things growing no better, but apparently worse, overstrained nature surrendered; it was necessary to ask for a relief.

"Can't stick it! Call yourself a sailor!" That was all the comfort that was granted. It stung, for I had come to think that I was performing miracles. But the ship was sheering savagely; it was not possible to watch her as alertly as before; and the sea was growing bigger and more vicious. The mate was aft at the time. Men were aloft, passing rope around the rigging, carrying it across the deck and passing it about the opposite shrouds, where it was set up with Spanish windlasses—capstan bars thrust through the turns and twisted until they could be twisted no more, thus bowsing the rigging inboard and taking up the slack that allowed the masts too much play.

"'Nother hand to wheel!" the skipper ordered. "Who's best man?"

"Rhys."

"Send him." The mate flopped away. Presently he reappeared with Rhys at his heels, and a huge Swede from his own watch. But relieving the wheel under present conditions was not the simple ceremony of ordinary times. It was necessary that the newcomers should get the hang of the ship, understand her frantic tricks, be ready to counter anything within a fraction of a second of taking charge. Rhys spat on his hands and took the lee wheel as a preliminary, stepping behind Frederiksen. We continued thus,

the guidance of the ship remaining with me meanwhile. There was no let-up in the strenuous action; the ship called for constant watchfulness. We sweated there, and it was as though our two minds were one. As the thought came to my mind that the wheel must go up, I could feel the commencing drag of Rhys's hands as I thought to steady; the spokes seemed thrown towards me. Rhys had that wheel-sense which many sailors never acquire; he seemed to know by instinct precisely what the ship was about to do next.

"Right—try her," said the skipper, who had been watching closely. The big Swede stepped behind Rhys and took the lee wheel from him. Rhys straddled over to me and laid hold of the spokes. He caught the wheel in mid-swing.

"Right; I've got her, son!" I yelled that the wind was to be kept on the starboard quarter.

"Ay, ay; stabbud quarter! Let go."

I squirmed from under him, and, the strain released, sat down limply on the deck. Nothing seemed to matter much just then. But through the dizzy buzzing of my brain I heard the skipper's voice rise to a scream:

"Watch her—God's sake!"

Then everything was shut out by cascading water, not liquid as men understand liquids, but something with the smashing force of a falling mountain. Bodies were washing to and fro as I was washing; we came into collision; we slammed against immovable fittings and were torn clear and cascaded onward. No question about it: the ship had got her death-blow at last—she'd run under. There was no feeling of resiliency or life in the stricken hull; it was inert, hit over the ropes at last, stunned. For long and very long—it seems like hours, but was in reality perhaps thirty seconds or even less—the fabric lay sodden and overwhelmed, and I contrived to thrust my head above water, clinging to something

that proved to be the rail that ran round the poop. And I was on the seaward side of it—swept overboard by the wave that had roared aboard before Rhys got the complete hang of the ship's needs! The mad scurry to return inboard may be left to the imagination; although in a dulled way it was felt the ship was foundering, yet—she was something solid to cling to.

She was clean under water. Only her masts showed to tell of her existence; white water swept the chart-room, the half-deck, the house forward; there was nothing to be seen of the forecastle head. Oh, of course she was for it—she'd had her day, but the deep peace of the lower Atlantic caves would bring her rest after much striving.

No, she hadn't finished yet. Far from it. As I clung, gasping, to that rail, with the ragged water tearing at me, hammering at me, wrenching furiously, I felt the hull quiver into awakening life. It was only a quiver, a single thrill running along, as though the ship were trying her strength without revealing its existence to the aggressor. Then she lifted, satisfied, apparently, that the fight was worth continuing. What trick of helm Rhys used to humour her I do not know; he did not know himself, but that helm-sense which he owned in such large measure dictated a correct policy. He did something that lifted the ship into a new life; she roared upwards, shedding the downbearing weight of water; she poised on a wave-crest like a startled bird, and then she fled forward again, throwing up her stern to another sea that threatened to complete the work of the first; and in a breath she was throbbing with determination and power—far from being knocked out yet.

"I felt it coming," Slumgullion said afterwards, when we compared notes. "Just come down from the main—tried to get up again, but it was too quick for me. Like the whole blessed Atlantic coming aboard, it was; I thought we were for it—no; I didn't

think anything. It got me full and bye; and, when I knew what was happening next, there was I jammed up on top of the windlass under the fo'c'sle head—rammed in as if I'd been a bale of cotton at Mobile—fact. Felt she was sinking then, but couldn't get clear—Lord! It was rotten—rotten. Dying under there, in the dark, wedged fast—wouldn't have been so bad out in the open, where you could see what was coming."

The wind was increasing in fury, if anything. Drift after drift of those black, massed clouds raged down on her, and each as it came brought an added scream and rumble, an added weight of horror. The miracle was that the canvas forward and aft could stand it as it did; but, parsimonious though our owners were in regard to such details as food and accommodation, they grudged nothing for the upkeep of the ship as a ship, and her topsails were brand-new and of the best quality. Otherwise she would not have lived through that historic gale.

The monstrous sea had finished the havoc of other seas; it had made a clean sweep of the ruins of the cabin skylight; the carpenter and his tools were nowhere to be seen. The cabins aft were gutted out, swilling with water four feet deep; hatches forward were crushed in like paper.

The skipper snatched at me as I hung there, trying to recover the ability to think for myself, and hauled my ear to his mouth.

"Find the mate! Tell him—heave to. Can't run longer. Heave to—d'you hear? I want him." He threw me away from him as he turned to grasp a holding; and I squattered along the poop. The mate was on the maindeck, always working, despite his injury. The chicken-coop had broken from its lashings and had been charging hideously about the decks in obedience to the ship's compelling rolls; it was uncontrollable, enormous; threatening to smash itself through the bulwarks and leave a breach that would

simply invite the seas to complete our destruction. But the mate was tackling this problem—because it seemed the nearest and most urgent, perhaps. He had got the end of a rope belayed to a pin, and had caught a turn about the heavy teakwood structure; he had snubbed the rope about another pin and was hauling it taut. The next roll found the coop straining madly at its bonds, the rope stretched and strained, but held.

“Here, catch another turn!” The heavy rope spanked me in the face as he hurled it; another turn was caught; a sea climbed aboard and smothered us; we emerged blowing like grampuses.

“Good-oh! Catch another—so-fash!” It was done; for the time being that menace was well scotched.

“Skipper says to heave to, sir.”

“Eh, what? Mustn’t call him skipper—captain, eh? Damned cheek of boys! Right.” He lurched aft; for myself I nipped into our wrecked half-deck and sat down on a creaking sea-chest, unable to endure the terrible hammering of wind and water longer. In this sea-parlour of ours was surcease from that never-lessening onslaught; a chance to breathe and rid oneself of the fear of death. There were many noises about; but they lacked the bitter velocity of the outside noises; chests creaked and slithered; an ink-bottle on the table rolled irritatingly from fiddle to fiddle, with a waste of spilt ink on the plank we had recently scrubbed and stoned to ivory whiteness; but that horrible thresh of wind-flung water was diminished by the intervention of the steel plating of which the house was built. One sat limply, his head pillowed on his arms which rested on the wobbling table—and so sleep came; the utter abandon of unconsciousness, bred of sheer fatigue, for there is no weariness so all-compelling as that bred of such a storm as we then endured.

And whilst I slept the ship was hove to—cun-

ningly, with a trickle of oil from her forward scuppers to soothe down the bigger combers as she was brought up to the wind. The men, having furled the fore topsail—and how they did it is unbelievable—having braced the yards sharp up on the backstays, were ordered to the rigging for safety; the skipper clambered to the chart-house top; Rhys caught a turn about his waist with the spanker boom sheet, in case he was swept away. Then the ship was eased up to the wind, slowly and gingerly; she came up shaking and curvetting like a passaging horse, so they said; a wave upreared as she hesitated and smote—she disappeared beneath a boiling horror; but when it passed she was up to the wind, bowing the seas, and riding in greater comfort.

Of this I knew nothing; not until the watch were allowed below did I arouse to consciousness.

Then, shaken into life by Slumgullion, I stripped off my useless oilskins and crawled limply to my bunk. We fell asleep at once—didn't care a hang what happened to the ship now. We were expended—finished; the last kick was out of us.

The gale continued for thirty hours without abatement. It was simply a repetition of what had gone before; men grew dazed; they staggered to and fro about their work like men in a trance. We spoke but little, even when below; words seemed unnecessary. We ate occasionally—tinned beef and biscuits, washed down with diluted rum, since no hot drink was procurable; we crouched on our chests, with knees braced against the table to prevent ourselves from shooting across the house; with sheath-knives dug into that table to keep our plates and pannikins from slithering all over the shop. There was nothing even approaching comfort obtainable; all was bleak misery and weariness, but behind all there was the driving force of the skipper's will that kept us going. He himself never left the deck during the whole period of the storm. As for Gwen—she

confided, shamefacedly, that she had spent the whole of the time crouched in the top bunk of her room, praying harder than ever she had prayed in her life before.

But even the worst storm has an end, one way or the other; and within a week we had forgotten all about this duster—the mate's broken rib, bound up by the skipper and second mate, was healing—he had the constitution of an ox, spite of many dissipations—and the ship was bowling along through sunny seas, with a vigorous north-east Trade blowing; and we were recovering our arrears of sleep and rest.

But more ships than one likes to think of failed to weather that storm: the "Missing" list at Lloyd's was woefully elongated as a direct result.

Considering everything, we had escaped lightly: there was no need to go into a port of refuge for repairs; all that was necessary to be done could be done aboard. The carpenter constructed a miracle of a new skylight; the bashed hatches were repaired and a preventer wheel was rigged; within that week it was hardly possible to see any traces of damage without a very close look.

The first-voyagers had had their salting, however; and the terror of that storm was deep printed on our souls. Some of us have not yet forgotten it; perhaps we never shall.

CHAPTER X

FINE WEATHER

IT is in the Trades that one realises the beauty of the sea more than anywhere else. There is grandeur in a heavens-hard gale; there is invigoration in even half a gale; a calm has its sleek, sensuous beauties; but for sheer loveliness and sparkle—for lightness of heart and a sensation of contentment, commend me to the north-east Trades, when they are steady and vigorous, as were the Trades we ran into after showing our stern to the Bay and the Western Islands, and burrowing down around the curve of the world towards the south.

We sent down the hard weather canvas the day we picked up the Trades, and bent fine-weather sails—old stuff that wouldn't matter if it were banged about and frayed and torn in the baffling Doldrums. It meant one day's hard work, but it was work carried out under ideal conditions; the ship was moving sweetly along with the wind well aft, and though the deep blue wilderness of the sea was gaily crisped with whitecaps, there was nothing approaching a bite in them, and the breeze was balmy and laughing—a man could sleep peacefully out on deck at midnight, with only his ordinary clothing on, and not be aware of any chill. But already our crew was beginning to reveal itself in its real capacity. The big gale had treated all men alike, and shirkers had hardly been noticed in the furious rush of events; now, with good times about us, but hard work promising, there were one or two mild attacks of "Cape Horn Fever," which is nowadays known as

scrimshanking. Old "Frenchy" was the worst offender. He said he was a Frenchman, but he might have been anything—a citizen of the whole wide world. He spoke English better than most aboard; he had a habit of using very long words—a habit in which he was outrivalled by the black cook, who gloated in polysyllables and used them freely with quaint effect.

Frenchy had not made a single friend aboard—he was like Kipling's cat who walked by itself. The night before the bending of fine weather canvas, when preparations had been made for the swift, fierce bout of work, Frenchy discovered that his old enemy, acute rheumatism, was troubling him. He promptly took to his bunk; and when visited by the skipper he told such a plausible tale, describing every one of his symptoms with such a wealth of detail, that he had to be believed and excused from duty. To the suggestion that he might be able to take the wheel throughout the day, and thus release a more vigorous man for work aloft, he returned groans—to move his arms meant excruciating agony. When, later, in our first port Frenchy deserted, we boys, on whom devolved the duty, naturally, of cleaning out the forecastles, discovered a dog's-eared fragment of a medical book, with the pages dealing with rheumatism and kindred complaints, heavily thumbled and crumpled, showing all evidences of most careful study; so there is reason to believe Frenchy's harrowing symptoms were culled in gross and detail from that learned tome.

Shirkers were not loved with us. A modern sailing ship is so sparsely manned that a single loafer means a considerable addition to the work of every other hand aboard; but Frenchy was entirely lost to a sense of shame. Yet, he was a good sailor in many ways—an "eyewash" sailor—the sort of man who could sew canvas with the neatness of a woman, who was an adept at fancy-work in the way of turk's

heads and manrope knots and those eye-catching efforts which go down with certain officers, and call for no great exertion on the part of the expert. Frenchy was not a good companion for inquisitive youth, be it stated. His trend of thought was mental filth, and there was not even the saving grace of humour in his voluble discourse. He would descend to the deepest deeps of beastliness when narrating his adventures in ports of half the world; but one day he went too far. He turned up at the wheel with a badly-mauled face, one eye surrounded by a nimbus of yellow-purple, and unpicturesque swellings everywhere. He had whacked up a foul gibe concerning Gwen, and he had spewed up his filthiness in the hearing of one of the half-deck crowd. Which of us it was doesn't matter—we were all her champions. So Frenchy was requested to retract his statement; he stubbornly refused, and as a result he promptly went through the mill. It was quite fair fighting, on the half-deck's side; but Frenchy fought foul, using his feet and head, and he would also have used a knife, had it not been taken from him by Rhys, who had appointed himself umpire.

"Who's been pasting your face?" the mate demanded, when Frenchy showed his shameful visage aft.

"I had the misfortune to stumble over a ringbolt in the dark, sir," said Frenchy. "My face came in violent contact with the barrel of the donkey-winch, hence these defacing abrasions."

"Umph! Looks more like fist-work to me; but I suppose it's your own affair."

But it was not until after Frenchy left the ship that we learnt the whole of his nastiness. It was Gwen who told us. Every word that was spoken forward, by foremast hands or apprentices, was passed aft by the toady, with embellishments. The customary growling that is common in every wind-jammer against the afterguard was transmitted as

faultlessly as if by a loud-speaking telephone; and the skipper encouraged Frenchy to act as tale-bearer by making him presents of tobacco and sundry garments from the slop-chest. This form of espionage was not pleasant; and in my opinion the man who listened to the tales was no better than the man who brought them aft; but perhaps the skipper thought it as well to keep his finger on the pulse of public opinion, in order to guard against possible disturbance. His ears must have glowed at some of the reports carried aft, if they were transmitted verbatim!

A whole volume might be written descriptive of the varying types we carried aboard that voyage. There was Finch—a man who bragged that he was a “Jank, by Yingo!” According to his own story, he had served in the hottest of all the hot hell-ships that once disgraced the United States flag. He had fought savage battles with bucko mates; he had invariably come off best, and been taken to the hearts of the afterguards concerned; he had been praised by men who had made it their boast never to pay off a crew, because they could drive them to desert without either wages or clothes by sheer bad treatment. Accepted at his own value, Finch was the most wonderful man alive. He had printed proof of it, which he was willing to show to anyone whom he could interest in his godlike superiority. In a vast and podgy brown-paper book he had collected newspaper cuttings from all the newspapers of the world, to all seeming, and every paragraph dealt with some astonishing exploit of one Edward Finch.

Edward Finch—sometimes the printed names were deftly altered with pen and ink, on account of indifferent printing, so went the spoken explanation—had dived overboard to save swimmers from sharks; he had rescued people from fires, he had fought notorious bruisers and generally walked a triumphant path through life. How he had amassed this astonishing and apposite collection of cuttings it is

difficult to understand, for our firm belief was that not a single one of them all applied to their owner. The man was an example of colossal vanity gone mad—he had deluded himself into believing that he actually performed these multitudinous heroisms. He would put one forefinger on a printed paragraph describing a lone trail through Hudson Bay country and reel off harrowing accounts of his sufferings, with local colour that it was impossible to contradict; and a few moments later he would be gloating over his reckless conduct in the southern seas. The only mistake he had made in compiling this stirring history was that he had neglected to fit in his dates properly. His appearance was that of a man of thirty, or, at the most, thirty-five; but by dint of close analysis, not a few of these heroisms had been performed when he was not more than four or five years old! Also—which was a dead give-away—he had been in the Arctic and Panama at about the same time! Once, when certain elemental facts of this nature were brought to his notice, he waxed angry—very angry; and commenced to shout blue murder.

“I’m the best little bucko in this gol-darned ship!” he shouted. He sprang into the air and slammed his feet together; he punched old Hendrik, a sixty-year-old Dane, in the jaw. “I’m a wolf an’ I’m howling!” he shrieked, swinging his arms in windmill fashion, and striding valiantly up and down. “The man who says I ain’t goes sick. Look at that hand—Mitchell shook it, said it was the straightest right in all America.” He thrust it under Rhys’s nose, as Rhys happened to be nearest. Rhys surveyed it calmly. He did not seem unduly impressed. He was chewing tobacco at the time—a favourite, if unpleasant, habit of his, as it was with most sailormen before the era of cigarettes.

“Take it away, I don’t like it,” he said, and filled the palm with brown tobacco juice!

We who watched expected an eruption; here was

the insult discourteous given, with malice aforethought. The fire-eater was challenged; all that astounding book of cuttings was blazing in fiery letters across his brain. It couldn't help but be so. This man who had fought with Sullivan, who had pulled the noses of hardcase Yankee mates, who had fought sharks in open sea, who had swum with lines to sinking ships—would assuredly drive the undersized Manxman into the ship's planking as if he were a nail!

We waited, breathless. Rhys went on sewing: he was putting a very neat patch into the seat of a pair of dungaree pants. Finch breathed deeply, and—walked away. The bubble was burst; he was exposed as an impostor, a thing of windy bluff.

"I've sailed shipmets with his like afore," said Rhys calmly, and threaded his needle with a steady hand.

But later in the passage Finch's mania assumed different proportions. His was that colossal egotism that presages general paralysis of the insane; and on an Easting day the black cook went aft and reported that the fresh water as served out overnight was undrinkable. It was vaguely reddish in colour—not the usual red of rusted iron, with which we were all familiar, but brighter, more of a vermilion hue. And the deck showed signs of the same colouring; there were obvious footprints leading from the forepeak hatch to the pumps. Further, in the forepeak, was a keg of red lead newly opened, with some ten pounds of its poisonous contents extracted; and—further still—Finch's boots were smeared with the pigment. He had concocted a plot to poison the entire crew, because they had fallen into the habit of laughing at his heroics and disbelieving his boastful narrations!

He was clapped into irons and confined forward; he was sent ashore when we reached port, and that was the last we heard of him: a hopeless, dangerous imbecile. But I have often in later days puzzled over

the concentration of effort, the cleverness and the vanity that enabled him to compile that truly wonderful newspaper history of his adventures, both before and after birth!

But the curious part was that though we openly disbelieved Finch's stories, we honestly believed every word spoken by Rhys, who never boasted, but made his narrations without embroideries, and who would state a most miraculous occurrence without putting one atom of expression into his voice. When he told us that his whaler had been "nipped" in the Arctic ice and that her crew had lived on the floes for months before being rescued by a Scandinavian, existing precariously on seal-meat and sea-birds' flesh, drinking seal-oil by the quart to keep out the cold, and enduring grim rigours, we believed every word, and to-day I am convinced Rhys spoke no less than truth. He had never fought a score of bloody rounds with a death- and brimstone-breathing Yankee mate; but he had been shot by one, because there was the bullet-scar in proof, not shown boastfully, but revealed by accident as he bathed. And although my sea-dad—on whom be the peace!—was the mildest of men vocally, yet—at certain times, he blazed out. As a case in point:

The mulatto steward also posed as something of a bruiser, especially when in his cups. Because of a certain bullet-headed, mighty-shouldered appearance of general heftiness, his assertions carried weight: he looked a fighting man. Not that he went seeking trouble; but he bore himself in an autocratic manner, and the coal-black cook trembled at his frown, as did certain of the forecastle hands—and amongst them the sailmaker, who was an escaped Siberian exile: a Russian of a leathery countenance, with the knout-scars on his lean and withered back. But, belonging as he did to the afterguard, the steward came seldom into contact with the foremast crew. Until, on the day after our arrival in port, when, recovering from

a comprehensive spree ashore, he discovered himself athirst for blood and fury. It was evening; captain and mate were ashore; the second mate had slipped across to the ship that lay alongside, where an old shipmate had been discovered. The steward freshened himself up with a drink and then walked proudly on his heels, challenging the ship to mortal combat.

"I'm de best man in dis ship," he asserted. "Dere ain't no one can stand up agin me. I smash de lot ob you—ebery man Jack." No one took much notice of him; it was a blazing hot evening; one when effort seemed unnecessary. Little Hendrik, installed as night watchman, was sweeping the poop-scuppers. He was a mild little man, tremulous through many years of alcoholic indulgence, harmless as a kitten: one who always bolted into the forecabin at the first sign of trouble. Upon him fell the steward, as Finch had fallen upon him aforetimes. He snatched the broom from the little, old, bald-headed veteran, and smote him about the hinderpart with the implement.

"What for you do dat, stooard?" asked Hendrik mildly, his eyes watering. "Ain'td I jour shipmet, eh?"

"Ef yo' want to fight, say so, or take de consekwinces," thundered the steward, plying the broom. "By golly, I smell blood; I lick de whole damn' ship. Go 'way, yo' white trash; go 'way. I lick de whole crew."

"Right, steward. Take me first." It was Rhys, not excited in the least. Had he not vowed that he would touch no drop of alcohol so long as the ship was in port? He slouched to the poop, his arms swinging carelessly; but there was action promised in his sinuous movements.

"I ain't in the habit of fightin' *niggers*," he said pointedly, "but since ye're so anxious fer blood, steward, let me some o' mine—do."

Fact outruns fiction, and especially so at sea. The steward gaped at Rhys with a dropped jaw.

"Or if you'd rather, I'll wait till ye're sober," said the Manxman coolly. "But if you want it now——"

"Why, Rhys, ain't I giv' yo' lots o' t'ings from de pantry?" asked the steward. "Ain't I—why, Rhys, yo' wouldn't fight *me*!"

"Then shut your big mouth an' don't go disturbin' decent folk. Get below, you *nig*. Hear me? Get below—sleep it off. Givin' the ship a bad name that ways! Black men shouldn't make a noise on a white man's ship. Get below." And the steward went; peace reigned; another bubble was pricked. By a quiet, little, sinewy man whō had confessed to me, too, in a moment of expansion, that he couldn't handle himself; that he disliked fighting!

I often think that my old sea-dad, had his lines fallen in happier places, might have become a truly great man, for he possessed a power of personal magnetism all to his own cheek that might have carried him far. But when we discussed this matter, as we did discuss it and a thousand others, in those long yarns that sailors spin together in the Trades, when I urged him to obtain education sufficient to qualify as an officer, to rise to command, his reply was invariably the same:

"I was born to be commanded, sonny; I reckon commandin' don't cut no ice with me."

But to describe the idiosyncrasies of all our outward crew, man by man, would occupy too much space for an age that seeks moving excitement, and takes but little heed of the personalities that whirl their way across the stormful backgrounds of the sea.

Otherwise, much might be said of our cook: the old giant "doctor," grey-haired as a badger, with the torso of a Hercules and the shins of a starving baby; who cooked miraculously when he cared; who read Herbert Spencer and Darwin for recreation, and who floundered into wordy mazes, pummelling polysyllables out of all recognition; who laughed like

thickened oil moving ; and who topped up every long-winded argument with the conclusive remark :

"Waal, chile, yo' might say it ; mind, I ain't deny-ing nuthin' yo' say ; but—waal, Barbados is a happy place."

And whole pages might go to the telling of our sailmaker's history, anarchist as he was, a man who, in telling of the woes of his kind in Tsar-ridden Russia, would work himself up into blind frenzy and stab at the canvas with his needle as if he were burying a poniard in a bureaucrat's heart. He hinted darkly of deadly plots that were in the making ; he spoke of secret gatherings, where the members draped themselves in black and masked their faces, lest their next neighbours should betray them ; he spoke of women with children at the breast flogged to ribbons as they fell weakly into the Siberian snow ; and he made prophecy that had since been amply fulfilled, though I doubt if he were present at that gory fulfilment.

Those were the days when the Russian menace towered bigly along Europe's horizon ; when Germany's ambitions were unspoken ; and old Sails, after one of his hoarse harangues—with a monstrous hooked nose and flaring, red-rimmed eyes, with scant yellow teeth and sparse, straggling hair and chin-beard, he looked more like a savage eagle than any man I have ever seen—would quieten down and say :

"Take-it no notice ; oh, dear me ! But when de big fight come, s'pose you fight one side I fight t'oder, I never keel *you*." All I had done to purchase this offering of life was to supply him with a bar of much-needed soap and a tattered copy of "Old Mortality" !

Heigho ! how those faces spring up out of the mists of the past ! And always, as setting to those faces, is the old ship's white-scrubbed deck, the high-arching pyramids of canvas aloft, the crisp sparkle of the tropical Atlantic, and the humming rumble of the happy Trade wind all about, with the silvery

flying-fish glinting brilliantly against the perfect sky as they flit from the sea to escape the dolphin, and fall back, their poor wings dried and useless, to find the fate that was foreordained. Good eating they made, though, when caught.

So back we get to the Trades again, and wonder as we go what medley of fates has overtaken those old familiar forms. Stormy petrels all of them, with no hope ahead beyond a continuance of soul-cramping labour and victimisation by shore-harpies and the leering sneaks who batten on the deep waterman's generosity and careless munificence when once ashore. They vanished into that mighty obscurity which closes round the men of the sea. Grant they found good moorings in the Final Port! With all their faults and weaknesses they were men.

Sundays were our great days, as was only natural. Fine-weather Sundays had much to recommend them to careless youth. Each Sunday evening the mate entered up—probably with his tongue in his cheek: "This day being the Sabbath, no unnecessary work was done," that the sea-law might be fulfilled which declares the Sabbath to be a day of rest.

But we scoffers had another Commandment which we considered fitted the case more accurately:

"Six days shalt thou labour and do all thou art able;

"On the seventh, holystone decks and scrape the
—— cable."

Actually, our fine-weather Sabbaths were something of a compromise between the two; days detested by mate and skipper because of the semblance of idleness that existed about the decks; days of planning on the officers' part—and of deep scheming to discover some fresh "frigging" that could, by a stretch of the imagination, be classified as "necessary work."

It was not until we got the north-east Trade that we had a real Sunday at all; previous ones, being stormful and boisterous, had differed but little from

ordinary working days. But this first decent Sunday lent itself to exploitation; and Bubbles, first-voyager, fell a natural victim, as shall be told in its place.

At eight bells in the morning—four a.m.—we of the starboard watch picked ourselves up from our blankets which we had coiled into on the after-hatch at midnight, and relieved the port watch. We had slept on deck for more reasons than one: foremost, perhaps, was the fact that the intense heat of the southern sun had beaten throughout a cloudless day on the steel-sided box that was our habitation, filling it within with suffocating stuffiness that set sleep at bay. And though door, skylights, and ports were wide open, there was nothing suggestive of coolth in the apartment. Too, the growing warmth had quickened certain other tenants of the place to vigorous life: they came forth from their winter quarters in plank-seams and bunkboards, and gave evidence of their hunger. Fleas were endurable, but there were worse; and although cockroaches were not harmful in the way of biting, yet they felt decidedly unpleasant when they dropped from the deck-beams and scurried for shelter over one's face; but the Philistines of ship-board were massed in force and had declared war against our rest, so—we surrendered at discretion, and carried blankets and pillows to the breeze-washed deck, where, though the wind was fresh, there was not even a suggestion of chill in its breath. And there, beneath those glowing stars, with the Great Bear dipping to the nor'ard and that disappointing constellation, the Southern Cross, rising from the southern curve of the horizon, we had slept like innocent children, lulled by plashing water and the slow breathing of the distended sails, the soft *Æolian* harping of the rigging and the dull padpad of the mate's patrolling feet.

But now it was our watch on deck, and discipline demanded that we should answer the customary roll-call, which we did, sleepily, not opening our eyes,

indeed, so that the interrupted slumber might be resumed as soon as the word: "That'll do, the port watch," was spoken.

For another blessed three-quarters of an hour we were undisturbed; but then morning coffee was ready; and we aroused ourselves leisurely, thanking our various gods for the easy boon of fair weather, when men might live more or less as human beings, and not in imitation of tide-swept rocks on an angry coast.

Morning coffee has much to recommend it, but the actual quality of the beverage hardly entered into the testimonial. It was hot and stimulating, and the mere effort of drinking it drove laggard sleep from our senses. Slumgullion, who had the six-to-eight wheel, dug down into his pannikin and fished up what might have been a laurel leaf.

"Rummy sort of coffee," he remarked. "Bought cheap—after a fire, I'd say." The beverage looked like thin mud, and it did not taste as coffee should taste; and the week's ration of small stores would not be issued until later in the morning, so there was, naturally, no sugar; since fourteen ounces of sugar won't last for ever—but we had got accustomed to the liquid and swallowed it with appreciation. Our last meal had been at six the previous night, and we were boyishly hungry. But we agreed the cook might have had the decency to clean out the copper after making overnight tea.

"Better go and see him about it, Ginger," was our verdict; and the cook's white-haired boy went for'ard, to return with a steaming pot of fragrant cabin coffee, ready sweetened and plentifully laced with condensed milk. With, further, crisp cabin biscuits and good salt butter, by way of relief from Liverpool pantiles and the cart-grease we were customarily supplied with under the entirely fictitious designation of margarine.

"Not a bad old coon, the Doctor," we agreed, wolfing greedily.

"I've got a dictionary in my chest," Slumgullion said. "He's a beggar for long words; and he can learn a lot more from that. Bags I we give it him—he'll look after us like anything then."

We spoke in hushed voices, out of respect for the port watch, who had braved the dangers of their bunks at four o'clock for fear of being disturbed by the deck-washing that is the holiest rite on shipboard. We drank and ate with the lamp turned down to a mere glow; later, a time was to come when we deliberately turned out the lamp before tackling the weevilly biscuit, so that our hearts should not grieve over the strange sights our eyes witnessed.

"Up aloft, one of you boys, and overhaul the main royal buntlines," came from the poop.

The thinning night had revealed to the second mate a tautened buntline across the lofty sail; and—he was the sort of man who liked an excuse for giving work. He had come to be cordially detested by his watch, who had no love for the man who nags and hectors with a view to currying favour with those superior to himself, and who, afraid of the men, yet lost no opportunity of "frigging" the boys, who dare not question what was, after all, a justifiable order.

"My next wheel," said Slumgullion, with an unholy chuckle. By tradition he was absolved from the duty—he was entitled to a smoke before standing his two hours' trick. "Up you go, Barnacles—exercise is a good thing after such a meal as you've eaten. Lord! I don't know where you stow it all. You're like a Dutch galliot—not much to look at but a beggar for stowage." There was still a smear of the viscous mixture of glucose and turnip that was labelled marmalade remaining in the wide basin that held our watch's common store. The basin fitted neatly on Slumgullion's crown, stickiness swam down his brow and into his eyes. There are more ways of repaying insolence than one.

I went on deck with speed, not waiting for my

messmate's pungent comments; said "Ay, ay, sir," to the second greaser in as surly a tone as could safely be employed without savouring of open insubordination; groped in the pocket of my dungarees to make certain there were the usual oddments of sailmaker's twine to hand, and started leisurely aloft. The resentment at being done out of a half-hour's smoke lasted just until the sheerpole was surmounted, and then it vanished, swept away by the glory that was coming to birth all around.

It was still dark—the stars still showed, though now with a more pallid light than before; and it was as though one thin veil of purple had been withdrawn from the canopy of the sky. Yet even the darkness was luminous and wonderful to behold. The breeze was an actual caress, balmy and invigorating.

"Who'd be pewed up in that fug-trap?" was the thought with which I made light of the task ahead. In the half-deck was stale heat, the sooty unpleasantness of an ill-trimmed lamp, an abundance of inquisitive cockroaches, the smell of half-dried clothes and close-stowed humanity; out here was life-giving freshness; air that intoxicated a man as he drew deep gusts into his welcoming lungs. There was no need to hurry either—and there was much to see and delight in. But it was not until the cross-trees were negotiated, the eyes of the topgallant-rigging reached, the greasy royal tie scaled, and the giddy topmost yard reached that the real beauty of the commencing day unrolled itself before my eyes.

To the east the sky was growing faintly luminous; there was a trivial line of crimson along the clean-cut horizon. To the west, on our starboard bow, a small fleecy cloud, sailing high: a fairy barque adrift on a mystic sea, turned all suddenly to rosy glory. The even breathing of the sea appeared to cease, as though the firmament held itself hushed and awed in readiness for the working of that daily miracle of the dawn.

The moon had set long since, though its luminosity was still apparent, faintly silvering the western sky. The sea stretched out, indigo, flecked with grey, appearing a level floor, broken only here and there by lessening phosphorescent flashes. Looking down, the ship appeared outlined in fire: the grey foam of her steady, easy progress clung all about her; her wake sparkled and flashed, as though set with jewels—a very Milky Way. Dully through the slow droning of movement came plops and plashes as flying fish emerged and submerged; and under-running the celestial harmony was the satisfying gurgling of broken water overside, to tell us of good speed made. The ship was pushing a curl of white foam before her clipper bow; it opened out fanwise abaft her catheads, it merged into the even track we showed astern.

And, as the eyes turned from that milkiness, behold the dawn had come, quickly, as if a great hand had wiped the purple from the night. The east was glowing with subtle colour: it was like a monstrous pearl shell, vari-coloured, shading with the utmost delicacy from rose to saffron, from saffron to gold, from gold to ultramarine. A thin ridge of cloud gathered a whirl of colour to itself and stood out, palpable, real, against the blueing background. Red, deep red, glowed the horizon itself; it seems impossible that colour could be so intense; the vivid splendour of it was like a blow upon the eyeballs.

One great planet remained, glowing goldenly in a whirl of gold; but all other stars had gone; Day, the Creator, had ascended his throne, and the lesser usurpers had fled.

Yet, withal, was a strange, expectant hush holding the world of sea and glowing sky in bondage. Even the wind seemed to lose some of its vigour; the sails crumpled and flapped, the ship lessened her splendid progress and appeared to poise, as though hesitant to move whilst the sun arose from his couching and

climbed the first stage on his journey to the zenith. Nay, more, she trembled, awe seizing her.

For an instant it was possible to see the sea as it really is : an ordered circle, vast beyond the dreams of vastness ; it was possible to see the very curve of the world. The line of the horizon was so astoundingly defined that one seemed to see clean beyond it. And the kaleidoscope of colour in the east whirled and changed dazzlingly ; glittering shafts of golden light fled up to herald the coming sun ; they lost themselves in the blueness of the vault of heaven. A scarf of cloud along the sea's rim showed black, then white, then scarlet, until it disappeared in golden uncertainty. Eye-aching in its vividness that gilded radiance grew, and at its foot a tiny speck that might have been a living flame. Then, with a bound, the sun uprose, stately, enormous, flattened and distorted at first, as though newly-molten and flung adrift by a careless Creator's hand ; rounding itself as it left its prison of the night, climbing up and up and gathering glory, flinging a triumphant fanfare of heat as he came.

It was Creation repeating itself ; the Voice had said : " Let there be light ! " and the light had come, not half-heartedly, but splendidly, as if rushing to obey that supreme Command.

And, careless though youth is, it was impossible to remain unimpressed ; to hold the hungry thoughts to workaday matters. To me it seemed as though the massed organs of all the world had sounded one stupendous note of praise ; and the thoughts flew straight to the footsteps of the Throne whose name is Light. For the east shone as might the opening gates of Heaven.

The awed breathlessness passed ; maybe it had only endured in the fancy ; the breeze recovered, the swelling canvas boomed and hummed, the reef-points drummed their merry tintinnabulation ; ropes frapped, spars creaked, and life stirred all about. But when

things are at their gloomiest, when one's faith totters and doubts gather thickly about the horizons of the soul, it is good to remember that perfect dawning.

Now the ship below began to show indications of a new day. The galley-funnel poured out an added wreath of smoke as the black cook stirred his fire and made preparations for the Sabbath meals, which, as was right and proper, eclipsed the meals of working days. The mulatto steward showed on the poop, white-aproned, white-clad; he moved towards the chicken-pens and excited cluckings climbed up to me on my lofty perch—there was a squawking and a fluttering, the steward moved forward, bearing a pendant fowl to be sacrificed for the cabin table. The bell aft tolled three strokes; the tiny figures on the fore hatch moved, the thin tappings of men's pipes were heard. The wash-deck tub rumbled aft and was deftly swung into place below the nozzle of the main water pipe; a pyjama-clad figure showed outside the companionway for a moment, gazed round the horizon, glanced aloft and retired—it was the skipper satisfying himself that no one was loafing.

“Royal-yard, there!”

“Sir?”

“Lay down from aloft—wash decks!” An end to dreaming—and the dreams had gone far afield! By the time the deck was reached the heat of the sun was already great, giving promise of a scorching day.

Washing down is almost a religious rite at sea: only the most untoward circumstances can cancel the function. It is not done merely for the sake of cleanliness, though that certainly counts; but it is necessary, and more especially in a cargo ship, to keep the deck-planking wetted lest it shrink and permit water to drop through to the cargo beneath. Too, it gives the watch something to do in that indeterminate time before the regular day's routine can be apportioned out.

Under such conditions as held this particular

Sunday morning, it was not an unpleasant function. Bare-legged, with crisp salt water gushing about you, it was even exhilarating; the water was mellow and soft; and the steadily scrubbing brooms seemed to blend into a not unmusical chorus. As senior apprentice of the watch, the ship carrying no third mate, it was my duty to heave the water—and, needless to say, every attempt was made to excel all the standards ever set by ambitious third mates in the past. To expend as little water as possible was the main aim—providing always the decks were thoroughly scrubbed—so that the men at the pump should be permitted occasional spells. And it was only a matter of practice to lay a bucketful of water on the planking almost perfectly flat; to lift a single rope-yarn from its lurking-place; to sweep a collection of iron rust and paint chippings through a scupper with one well-thrown bucketful. Formed in line abreast, the broom-wielders moved steadily forward, from taffrail to poop-break; a chain of buckets ran from hand to hand. A pause to fill the skipper's bath tank; to renew the water in the fire buckets; then down to the main deck and so to the 'midships; then a fleeting of the wash-deck tub forward, a new commencement on the forecastle head—a bit of a slackening when well forward and out of sight from the poop, perhaps a surreptitious whiff from a pipe.

"No hurry, is there? Only means sweatin' everything up if we're finished too soon!" came from Faulken. But the second mate had other views: he came forward and began bustling about, he went aft again, pausing on his way to test the tautness of halliards and braces.

"The greaser's slacking 'em off," said Faulken. It was true; in order that we might be worked to the last minute our watch-officer was easing off the ropes a little here and there, so that we might have the privilege of hauling them taut and doubly taut again.

The glory of the morning had brought no gentleness to his embittered soul!

This day being the Sabbath the brasswork aft, permitted to grow green and unsightly during working days, must be polished to exceeding brightness: a duty which fell to Ginger's lot. A loathsome job it is, and has but little to do with sailorising, but the decree had gone out; and Ginger was aft, scrubbing away at the binnacle-hood, and gurgling his most original oaths to Slumgullion, now at the wheel. The second mate decided to be facetious—Ginger was fair game, and, too, since Slumgullion had early on asserted his right to consideration, the greaser evidently thought he would elevate himself in our messmate's eyes by making a butt of the lad.

"Better save a bit of that bathbrick and oil, Ginger—give your brains a polish when you go below," he said. Ginger scrubbed on, mired with the filthy stuff to the elbows, smeared as to face and hair.

"It is supposed to be an excellent polish for manners," he remarked mildly, but with a very refined accent. The second mate flushed—he was very touchy on the question of deportment. Then he called Ginger the unforgivable name and punched him. Ginger collected himself, and without haste, threw the tinful of polishing stuff into the second mate's face; following it up with an unscientific rush, his arms swinging like a windmill's. Being a lumpy fellow, spite of his lack of science, he carried the officer to the rail, where he slipped and rolled into the scuppers. Being a gentleman and a sportsman, Ginger stood back, blowing on his knuckles. The second mate got up, using language to fit the occasion, and, dropping his head, butted with terrific force into the lad's stomach. It was the type of fighting he had been accustomed to in Liverpool's streets, what time he sold newspapers there. As Ginger doubled and retched hideously, stumbling

sickly to the wheel grating, the second mate was on him again, driving blow after blow at the lad's bent head. Until—he was torn away and swung round, to meet Slumgullion's blazing eyes.

"You dirty Liverpool cully!" said the lad. "Hit me, you stinking coward! Come on."

The second mate wiped the clotted grease and brickdust from his face and snarled: "You keep out of this!" he said. "'Tisn't your show."

"Hit me, oh, hit me!" demanded Slumgullion, fairly dancing with excitement. By the law of the sea it is insubordination to strike an officer—unless the officer strikes first. It may be the second mate was worked up to the real fighting frenzy; perhaps the smart of the filthy stuff in his eyes bit him to action. He said nothing, but swung his fist at Slumgullion's jaw, without warning. Slumgullion laid his head to one side, and the big fist whizzed over his shoulder; but the law of the sea had been complied with; he was justified now in striking back. And he was no slack-jointed, clumsy-limbed Ginger, but a tough, compact lad of eighteen and a half, hardened by close on two years of the hardest work a lad could know. Simple food, open air, the clean kiss of salt-laden breezes, strenuous toil, all these had knitted his muscles and built up his bones; and, at the school he had attended before coming to sea, there had been a gym instructor who had held records as a middle-weight fighter. It seems possible that Slumgullion was his favourite pupil.

The lad threw himself into correct fighting posture, and, as the second mate's face came forward, he upper-cut him neatly on the side of the jaw. The officer's head snicked back.

"He didn't know the first thing about handling himself," Slumgullion said, when narrating the affair. "He tried his butting tricks, but I was wise to them—gave him my knee and he soon got tired of that. Then he tried kicking, and that was a bit tricky, but a few

in the face settled him all right. He went wide after a bit, and I hadn't the heart to make a clean finish of it—though he deserved it."

Ginger said that it was a splendid fight; and he gazed on Slumgullion as he said it with almost dog-like devotion in his eyes. "But I think the greaser will have it in for you, Slum, old chap," he added.

"Well, we know where we stand now," said our chum. "It's been working up for this for a long time; it had to come sooner or later to clear the air."

He was right: in a small community like a sailing ship there is no room for harboured dislike and veiled hostility. It is astounding—as we later found out—how a "rot" can set in, with men taking sides and declaring vendettas against watchmates, for no real reason except that the monotony of existence has rattled their nerves and "fed them up" with the existing state of things.

But Slumgullion's scrap with the second mate was not to pass unnoticed by superior authority. It was out of the question that the officer's punishment should go unobserved; his scars of battle were so extraordinarily obvious, for Slumgullion had fought a scientific fight, and had, to use his own expression, "Pasted the swabtail one or two hefty smites."

Later in the day, as we were on the point of turning in:

"Courtenay! Hi, one o' you boys, tell Courtenay to come aft here," sounded the captain's voice from the poop. Slumgullion writhed his features as one eating a sour apple.

"Now for a bit of bull-dozing," he remarked, drawing on his pants. "Shed no tears when I'm shot at dawn, but cover me mortal remains with the jolly red duster, and say 'e did 'is damndest to lead a honest life. On as thou wert wont—wont wert——"

"Courtenay; where's that dratted boy?"

"Coming, sir—rot it!" The first words were loud, the last diminuendo.

We gathered it was a poignant interview; with the mate to interpolate ungracious remarks in support of the captain's criticisms.

"He was all for ropes-ending me at the start," Slumgullion told us. "Talk about belaying-pins and pistols! Said he was jolly well damned if he knew what discipline was coming to if a cub of an apprentice could go slamming second mates about the place as if they were bally Squareheads. Oh, yes, he was rorty enough—nasty bit of work, our brave man in command!

"Talk about your Sabbath peace! He was wilder than wolves. Oh, a very naughty old gentleman, indeed. And the old *primera piloto* chanting a sort of Greek chorus to everything he said. Didn't give me a look-in at the start—both of 'em opened out with all broadsides, bow- and stern-chasers and small-arm fire."

We had recently been refreshing our memories with perusals of Marryat's works.

"According to the way they looked at things, keel-hauling would have been something in the way of a decoration for distinguished conduct. Shouldn't have been surprised if they'd strung me up by the thumbs to the mizzen rigging and given me five dozen cold with ratline stuff. Old Perkins said he'd seen men shot for less, and prophesied hanging before I was out of my time. Lordy! didn't they rub it in; made me feel like a worm! So I stuck it out as long as I could, and then I up and said: 'The second mate started it, sir.'"

"'That's a lie,' said the skipper, straight off: I being a boy, the second mate being a blimy orf'cer.

"'It's truth, sir,' said I, and before he could wither me with a glance, I got in my side of the yarn. Didn't like peaching on a chap I'd licked, but—you meet dirt with dirt in deep-water craft, eh? Thought the greaser was more of a sportsman than to go whining."

"What happened then?" we asked breathlessly.

"Oh, the skipper talked about loggings and bad references and the usual tripe. Said he believed it was a case for reporting to the owners, if not the British Counsel. Didn't know what would become of me if this was the way I started. Didn't I know that a meek and humble spirit was one of the essentials of a good sailor; must learn to obey before I could learn to command—like a blessed tract, he was. Said second mates weren't put aboard to be slammed round the decks by second voyagers. Said second mates had a reason for existence, although we didn't seem to think it. He talked second mates for quite a long time. He wondered what I should feel like if I'd been second mate and a boy had pasted me all the colours of the rainbow.

"I told him then that if I'd behaved like certain second mates I wotted of, I'd have considered I'd got off lightly. He told me not to get uppish or he'd sail in himself, and that would be more than I could tackle in comfort.

"'Did he strike you first?' he asked me. I said 'Yes, and Ginger was a witness to it.' And although it's not much of a catch spinning yarns about another chap, I up and told him how the greaser'd started in on you, Ginger. Then the old man and old Perkins looked at one another, and both of 'em nodded a bit; and the skipper said that I ought to know better than to start a rough house on a Sunday; and did I know that it put a man off his feed to sit down opposite a face such as I'd given the greaser, and then I knew there wasn't anything serious coming, when they started to pull my leg about it, and—well, that's all."

But there was more, though it was only elucidated at the cost of much inquisitive cross-examining. Not that it need be gone into here—but we had some insight into it all when, a little later, the mate himself thrust his head in at the half-deck door. He looked anything but amiable; the usual plum-colour of his cheeks and nose was not diminished one jot; his

great walrus moustache still drooped portentously; his eyes were bagged, and the hard deep-drawn lines of knowledge that were drawn from nostril to chin were, if anything, more evident than usual.

It was as though a king walrus had suddenly framed its head in the opening of the door; against the clear azure of the sky the face showed grotesquely.

"Anyone got a match here?" he asked in his usual gruff tones. Ginger's bunk was nearest the door; but Mr. Perkins ignored the proffered box and took the one Slumgullion advanced, rattling it as he did so.

"This place is like a pigstye," he observed, lighting his ancient pipe. "Surprised you boys are content to live in filth. Er—here you are, Courtenay." He threw the matchbox into Slumgullion's bunk and backed out on deck. But as he went I swear I heard him mutter:

"Sanguinary steamboat sailor—Cocky Liverpool guttersnipe!" Slumgullion sat up a moment later.

"Here's larks," he said in an awed voice. "Look!" He held up half a dozen Burmah cheroots lashed together with a bit of spunyarn. On the evidence Slumgullion's transgression was forgiven by the afterguard. The second mate had made himself as unpopular in the saloon as on deck.

That afternoon, having the two-to-four wheel, I was drowsing over the spokes in real Sunday-in-the-Trades fashion, when Gwen, cool and summery in white, uphove herself from the deck-chair on the shady side of the chart-room and wandered leisurely aft. The second mate, whose face was changing colour like a chameleon, was pacing athwartships, forward of the chart-room, and he seldom turned aft.

Gwen ostentatiously hauled in a fishing line that was towing from the taffrail, and rebaited it with a fragment of chicken that she had evidently culled from the dinner-table. Then, speaking sideways, she said:

"Who did it—to *him*?" She glanced forward, but the greaser hadn't observed her.

"Tell me," she whispered eagerly. "Did you?"

"No, it was Slumgullion."

"Hurray! The beast tried to kiss me yesterday. Tell Slumgullion to be under the break of the poop at five o'clock, and I'll kiss *him*!"

"I'll sail in and give him another dose," said I vaingloriously. "If old Slum'd known he would have given him twice as much."

"He's a pig—ugh! steamboatman!" She made a face at the unconscious officer. "But you in the half-deck are all right." She watched the second mate thoughtfully for a moment or two, then she suddenly swung about, laid her tanned hands on my shoulders, and—gave a trifle on account of what she considered she owed the half-deck crowd.

So naturally the rest of the trick was spent in dreaming wild, vague dreams, in which Gwen figured as heroine in daring 'scapes by flood and field, with the writer of these rambling memoirs as hero; and it is to be feared the steering suffered somewhat, judging by the lop-sided frowns of the second mate whenever he looked at the zigzag wake which would have made a tortured snake mad with envy; but he said no word of remonstrance. All said and done, I was bigger than Slumgullion, and had earned a reputation, altogether undeserved, for an ability to handle myself.

Account it to me for righteousness that I delivered Gwen's message to my messmate. He received his reward, and afterwards he and I formed a brotherhood of our own, compared with which Kingsley's Brotherhood of the Rose was mere vulgar nonsense.

Well, thinking of pretty Gwen kept us from thinking of other matters that trouble the fevered souls of youth; and perhaps we were none the worse for our vows of chastity, chivalry, and knight-errantry. But what most troubled us was this: If the second mate

tried any more of his tricks on with our Princess, who was to give him the hammering he deserved?

All this is running ahead of the reckoning, which set out to give a description of a sailing-ship Sunday. Let us continue from the moment when Slumgullion won his victory over the watch-officer.

Sunday breakfast differed but little from ordinary breakfasts, save that fresh bread was doled out to us, in appetising "rooties" that were as good in the eating as any Vienna rolls I have since tasted. And in place of the everlasting, nauseating "scouse," we had baked beans and pork, not in abundance, by any means, but still sufficient to remind us of the taste of the things. There was no sugar, though Ginger had sung a crow-voiced song of appeal at the galley door when he fared along with the headless marmalade tin that was our coffee-pot and the wooden kit that formed our entrée dish. Even the gift of the dictionary failed to bring forth sugar, and the marmalade was expended also; but we fared well enough, and brought to the meal an appetite which beat any cunning sauce ever devised by the craftiest chef.

The port watch, who had vacated the half-deck on our entry, had gone forward to busy themselves in approved Sunday fashion: by washing their clothes under the forecastle head; and no right-thinking sailor would ever commit such an error of judgment as to wash clothes in his watch below. We ourselves had used the first watch overnight for the purpose, washing more by faith than by sight, and perhaps with less water than either. But as a result we had clean dungarees to wear and pseudo-clean shirts, though our mothers would have wept at our primitive ideas of blanched whiteness. Still, considering the fact that we had done a fortnight's washing at the least in something like a pint of fresh water apiece, we hadn't done so badly. There is no overplus of fresh water aboard a windjammer—three quarts a day per man is the ration, very seldom exceeded, for when the ship

fares out to the deeper seas, no man knows whether three months or five will elapse before she reaches port again, and strict economy in water is insisted on from the moment the tanks are filled.

Out of that three quarts of a daily dole, we had to pass five pints per man to the cook for culinary purposes; this left us one pint per day for drinking and washing ourselves and our clothes. In torrid weather clothes are not often washed. We had voted overnight that our next real laundering should not take place until we entered the Doldrums, where heavy rains were certain to be encountered; fresh water—we called it fresh, though after being in our cask for a couple of days it stank to high heaven—was too precious to be squandered on such trifles as laundry work. Meantime, we used the little that remained for our toilettes—we had all risen to the dignity of the *toga virilis*; and though our razors lacked keenness, we lacked nothing of zest as we scraped away at the week's growth on chin and cheek, and listened hopefully for that satisfying rasp which should tell us our beards were gathering strength.

At the end of his barbering, Ginger's face looked several degrees more unsightly than did the second mate's: he was a chaos of blood and lather, and growled out curious oaths to certify to all concerned that he would grow a beard and be swoozled if he didn't. But we made our concession to the day, and then—as we washed, in the shaving water, with a lather-brush for sponge and loofah—what should happen but that Bubbles should drift into the apartment in search of more soap. Frenchy had cajoled one bar from him already, and Bubbles' allowance of soap ran something like one bar to one shirt, and then his garments were far from clean, until Rhys took the whole lot from him and with half a dozen rubs brought them to the likeness of snow.

The vivid freshness of the atmosphere, the recent victory, and the still more recent meal had inclined

us to a more joyous outlook on life than perhaps was customary.

Bubbles had arrived : a heaven-sent target for our blunt-edged wit. It was too good an opportunity to be missed.

"What are you doing dressed like that on Sunday?" was the first question hurled at him. "Didn't Crowther tell you?"

Sheer bewilderment showed on his face.

"I—why, what's wrong, Barnacles? I didn't know——"

"You young heathen! The first fine Sunday at sea, and you're to ring the bell for church; didn't you know that?"

Ginger, who had on one occasion been sent to ask the mate where the young gentlemen's hip-baths could be found, what time the mate was shortening sail in a sudden squall, entered into the spirit of the thing.

"It's No. 2 uniforms for first church at sea, isn't it?" he asked innocently, and at once commenced to dive into his engorged sea-chest. From the litter within he extricated a much-creased serge uniform jacket that smelt of mouldiness: its buttons were green with verdigris, and there were many paint-stains on it. But Ginger shook it out purposefully, and dived again, lugging forth a sorry rag of a white shirt. Bubbles watched these operations with curiosity and awe.

"You'd better look slippy, young Bubbles: junior apprentice of the watch on deck has to ring the bell and show the crew to their seats. You'd better get into uniform."

The youngster swallowed the bait handsomely. "Of course, I might have known there'd be service," he said, and set to work at his chest. It was a beautiful chest, amply stocked with many necessary and more unnecessary articles, for Bubbles was one of the many who had fallen victim to specious advertising

outfitters, who guaranteed to find gorgeous berths on fine clipper ships with "kind, Christian captains who delighted in teaching navigation," for such trusting souls as bought their outfits from them. And Bubbles' people had fallen thoroughly to the lure—they had given the sharks a free hand. The lad withdrew a very handsome and unworn No. 2 uniform suit—we pawned it for ten-and-six a month or two later and spent the proceeds on a stupendous blow-out in Sydney!—and proceeded to make his toilet. High and glossy was the collar he donned, irreproachable the white shirt; he blacked his boots and attended to his nails.

"Now, if you'll get out, you'll give us room to change," we told him; and he went on deck, to parade magnificently back and forth abaft the half-deck. The mate, leaning over the rail, studied him thoughtfully; he looked aloft with malice in his eyes, as though contemplating sending the lad to the royal yard; thought better of it, and went on smoking. But as Service was a thing entirely foreign to our ship's programme, nothing was done to indicate its near approach.

Bubbles still walked up and down; the bell aft was struck.

"Now, go along and ring the bell—slowly, like a church bell," we hissed; and Bubbles obeyed. As he crossed the poop he encountered the skipper, who sighted him and gasped.

"What d'you think you're doing up here in go-shore rig?" the skipper asked.

"Going to ring the bell for Service, sir."

"Service be ——!" roared the skipper, in no great humour. "Service aboard this packet! The devil! Someone's been pulling your leg, youngster. Get out!" Crestfallen, on the verge of tears, Bubbles moved to the poop ladder.

He was just descending when the skipper shouted: "Hi! You youngster—what do they call you?"

"B-bubbles, sir—that is, Tomlinson, sir."

"Since you're figged out in that fashion, Tomlinson, keep those clothes on and come aft to dinner in the saloon at one bell. Just tell the fellows who pulled your leg *that*." And we who heard pulled long faces, for the jest was dead against us. In the result we jokers dined off Harriet Lane, which is also known as Fanny Adams, the varying names referring to various murderers' female victims who were believed to have been cut up after murder, boiled down and tinned, to supply deep-water sailormen with so-called fresh meat, whilst our victim fared sumptuously on soup and sauté fowl, with trimmings in the way of a lordly ham, and a noble plum duff. Be sure he spared us not one shade of the many flavours; be sure he smacked his youthful lips over the perfection of that meal!

"And I sat next to Gwen, too," he exulted, "and squeezed her hand under the table all the time I wasn't eating."

"Fat lot of squeezing you did, then, I'll bet," growled we. "You might have swiped what was left of the duff and wrapped it in your handkerchief."

"I forgot to take one," said the lad simply. "I must have got out of the way of using one."

There really was not much to do in the afternoon watch, except to sneak forward and listen to the yarning of the men as they washed their clothes. Most heartily did we wish that Rhys was in our watch, so that we might get him "on the yarn"; because these watchmates of ours were practically all foreigners, and they talked of trivial, homely things which failed to interest us, as they washed away. To a man they were good craftsmen at this particular job, and the garments, when suspended to dry, would have reflected credit on a well-equipped laundry.

They talked of grey Norwegian fjords and blonde maidens who dwelt on their shores; they talked of South Sea islands, too; of the ports of the world, which they had visited without seeing much of, be-

yond the public-houses nearest the docks. One of them had served a term in the United States Navy, and brought out a Navy-pattern jumper in proof; we tried to be interested in his account of life as lived beneath the Stars and Stripes, but as his yarning grew altogether too far-fetched, we drifted away aft again, keeping as much as possible out of sight of the poop, in case the second mate should discover a job of work to be performed; then we sneaked into the half-deck and got books and ancient magazines, and coiled down for a surreptitious read. But we voted "sea-stuff" tame, with one accord; the fellows who wrote it were either painting the picture too bright, or they didn't know the first thing about the sea. No, what we wanted was high-falutin love stories, with bonny English girls wandering in rose-filled gardens: something that conveyed a suggestion of those homes which lay so many foamy leagues astern the ship. And then—the higher gods being gracious—in a tattered magazine that had been fished out of the second mate's locker what time one of us was sent down for a stay-sail hank—we happened across certain ringing stanzas of poetry that seemed to us like real action in verse.

"I say, listen to this," said the one who made the find, and recited sonorous sentences.

"Crikey, that fellow's a good hand at the wheel. Who is it? Why, you can just see those old chaps stalking through the jungle to avenge their white officer—and can't you hear the blood dripping from those baskets, eh?"

"Chap called Kipling—Rudyard Kipling. I'd like to get hold of some more stuff like this; wonder where there is any."

"I'll write to an aunt of mine and ask her to get us some," said Ginger. "Read it again, Barnacles. Wish I'd gone into the Army—that's something like life! Expect the writer is a soldier."

But, later, when the asked-for volumes arrived at an iniquitous port on America's west coast, we voted

with equal certainty that the writer was unquestionably a seafaring man, because he'd got the tang of salt water into his words, and he showed the sea as it was, without the usual trimmings.

Years afterwards another story by the Wizard happened along, and the present scribe tendered it for criticism to a grizzled Scots engineer—chief of a tramp steamer. The yarn had to deal with engines and the men who run them.

"Well?" I asked the chief; "what do you think of that yarn?"

He spoke with well-weighed judgment; he was never a man to commit himself hurriedly.

"I dinna ken wha thon felly is," he said, "but he's an engineer—a Scotsman at that."

Which was not a bad word of praise, when you come to think of it.

So the crisp, good afternoon drowsed away. I went to the wheel and relieved Frederiksen, who by this time had acquired sufficient English to assure me that he was going forward to indulge in a sailor's pleasure—which means turning out the sea-chest to the last item in it, reflecting for a while on each garment or oddment, spinning yarns about such as call for yarns, and restoring everything much as it was before; and my two messmates occupied themselves after their own fashion—Ginger with sleep, Slumgullion with a book. Of course, we had vowed to keep exhaustive diaries of the voyage, and equally of course, after the first day's entries, we had failed to fulfil our promises; we had also vowed to write long, interesting letters, a little every day, giving a full and detailed account of all that happened, but—our writing cases were stored away at the bottom of our chests, and there they would remain, forgotten, until we reached port, and compiled the usual screeds: "We arrived safely after a pleasant voyage of ——— days. All's well. Please send some money."

But it was pleasant to be at the wheel, neverthe-

less; to feel the sense of mastery one held over the bounding fabric; to gaze aloft at the sun-gilded swells of the sails, and to listen, half sleepily, to the droning chorus. Good, too, to stare out over the vast blue wilderness, as blue as the eyes of an Irish girl, or bluer; to watch the little glittering shoals of flying fish; to see the sunlight glint silvery from something beneath the water and to look intently until, with a bit of a thrill, one recognised the long, oval shape just under the surface, with a thin, black dorsal fin showing, for a lurking shark. And then, quite naturally, the imagination drew strange pictures—of Gwen falling overboard, of the Brotherhood diving after her, knives between teeth, and fighting a mad battle with the tiger of the sea, who is not nearly so tigerish as many people suppose, but something of a coward in the presence of man.

Best of all, when one bell had gone, and the mate and skipper had been called for afternoon tea, to hear Gwen at her piano, playing over the old familiar hymns one by one: tunes, these, that sent the fancy roving very surely back to visions of a squat, old church tower silhouetted against a glowing sky, with the solemn tolling of bells and the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep—and all the soft, saddening memories that come with thoughts of Home.

And then it was eight bells, and one was free to go below—or to stray to the main hatch, where Rhys, dapper in sailcloth and carpet slippers, clean-shaven and shining like a morning star, patched diligently at some garment that had been already patched beyond recognition, and told unbelievable tales that kept us in a fever of excitement. A bit of excitement followed later, when small stores were issued, and the "Peggies" went aft to draw the week's rations of margarine, marmalade, and sugar—only fourteen ounces of the latter, as two ounces were deducted from the ordered pound for the purpose of sweetening the daily issue of anti-scorbutic limejuice.

"I once sailed in a ship where they had scurvy," said Rhys. And scurvy reminded him of yellow fever, and he took us to the grim, heavily-scented marshes of Santos, or to the wonderful harbour of Rio; and there we saw through his eyes hale men stricken down with the fell disease almost before they could draw breath, and carried ashore to the lazar house to die in all the throes of horror and agony, whilst hospital attendants, long inured to such suffering, waited grimly for the death-bed to be vacated to provide room for yet another case.

"There was one skipper I sailed with," Rhys said, puffing sedately at his pipe. "Little man—forgotten his name; hailed from Liverpool, though. None of us thought much of him; we'd been used to sailin' with slapdashers; men who cracked on like the devil. This chap shortened down a week afore any weather come along. Mild-mannered man he was; not like some men I've sailed with. Used to say: 'Please' an' 'Thank ye.' Didn't believe in work-up jobs; an' that didn't suit Mister Mate, who was a hustler from Hustlerville on the River Hustle.

"Bit of a Methody, too—always went to Bethel when the ship was in port. We was Bethel ship whenever one was wanted: poop all awned and screened, an' the women aboard with their harmoniums an' gadgets.

"The mate used to tell us what he'd do to us if he had command; oh, he was a oner, he was. Second mate the same—sailed in the Black Ball Line, he had. Acted to correspond—you always felt he had knuckle-dusters on his hands when he spoke to you.

"We fetched up at Santos, an' the skipper wouldn't give us no liberty ashore. 'Aft we went—all hands an' the cook—to protest.

"'You don't know what's good for you, my lads,' he says, as soft an' perlite as if he was leadin' a prayer meetin'. 'There's Yellow Jack ashore there an' men dyin' like flies.'

"Well, we argyed an' argyed, but he was as stubborn as a hawser-laid wire rope. So there we was, cooped up aboard, on our bare whack, 'cause he wouldn't take water from the shore, along of it bein' tainted with fever-bugs, he said. But one night they left the copper punt afloat, 'stead of haulin' it up as usual, an' some of us reckoned that the day an' the hour was ripe; so we looked over our chests to see what we could spare—there wasn't no five shillin's on Saturday, you see—an' when it got comfortably dark, over the bow we went, an' ashore like Jimmy-oh.

"Well, there didn't seem anything much the matter when we gets ashore. A *vigilante* tried to stop us, but we wasn't havin' any, so we pitched him into the ditch, an' sold our togs an' went for a bust. Got back all safe an' sound, too—no one knew. Then we left, an', 'bout a week or so out, we found we'd brought Yellow Jack with us. A big Englishman started—he'd got as tight as a whelk, an' we'd had to gag him to get him aboard 'thout shoutin' out what he'd do to the mate when he caught him—an' he died. Died nasty, in a way o' speakin'. Another two or three sickened. Wasn't any hell-ship talk along o' the mate an' second about then—they allus got well to wind'ard o' any of us they saw. But the old Methody skipper he just did fine. Bundled all who'd been ashore into one fo'c'sle, an' forbade anyone to go in it but himself. Nursed the lot, he did—nursed us well. Saved my life, I reckon. An' after it was all finished an' done with, when such as got better was better, an' such as died was sewn up in canvas an' slung overboard, he marches the lot of us aft an' logs all such as had been ashore for absence without leave. Wonder where he is now?"

Rhys's yarns were endless in their variety—the mention of any ship or any place would set him off. If at one moment we were sizzling in Santos, the next we were shipwrecked on Tierra del Fuego or bursting

through Arctic floe-ice in chase of fur-bearing seals or Polar bears; if a remark were made about the mate, Rhys had known a dozen worse and a hundred better; and, as usual, his last ship had been a floating hydro with nickelled fittings and soft music playing whenever required, as is customary amongst old shellbacks the world over.

So that it was difficult to tear oneself away at two bells for supper—not that the supper was much of an attraction in itself; but the cravings of the inner man had to be obeyed, and there weren't so many meals that one could be ignored.

The second dog-watch was a chance for getting to know our fellow-apprentices of the other watch: as soon as the sun had set in a welter of rose and gold glory, as the laughing water drew a purple veil across its face, and the glowing stars blazed out in welcome to the fast-falling darkness, we slipped below and crowded on the sea-chests, and talked and yarned to our hearts' content. Naturally enough, on this evening, Slumgullion's fight had to be discussed in all its details; all hands agreed solemnly that the second greaser had got no more than he deserved.

"Let's have a sing-song," was suggested presently. We started with hymns, old favourites; and Crowther, who stammered when excited but who possessed a pleasing tenor voice, led the harmony gallantly. But the hymns degenerated to songs, sentimental at first, more boisterous later, and the concert terminated in yelled staves that ought never to have sullied our tongues, I suppose. From "Abide with me" to "I'll go no more a-roaming" is a long and variegated sweep, but we navigated it, and maybe the day of rest was none the worse for our impiety.

We were simply giving vocal expression to our abounding youth and vigorous health and strength. Lord! how fit we were—with no consciousness—no real consciousness—of our stomachs, our hearts or our souls! Young animals in the main we were;

with iron-hard muscles and sound digestions, care-free, not afraid of work when it came, but not afraid to shirk a bit if the opportunity occurred; with "gold and Greek and love alike unknown to us," but always conscious of a desire for more food.

Who it was who doused the light, I do not know; but three voices shouted "Rough house!" together, and there in the darkness a mad *mêlée* took place—a frantic scrimmage in which were no friendships and no favours. Feet shot through the gloom as did hands; wet towels whirled; a yelp came from Bubbles, a blood-chilling stream of harmless anathemas from Ginger, that died away in gurgles; my eye came in contact with some careless fist; there was the cooling drip-drip of liquid; then someone lit a match and rekindled the lamp, and we collected ourselves and took stock. It had been a brief interlude but a profitable one. Ginger's lower parts protruded from the almost empty water-cask in the corner by the door; his big feet waved like a semaphore. At the bottom of the cask was foul-smelling slime; judging by the wafted airs that reached us Ginger's hair was disturbing the muddy sediment. Bubbles was wrapped, as to the face, in a sodden dungaree jacket, Slumgullion's face was plentifully besmeared with the soot from the untidy lamp-glass; the tea-can had been capsized neatly over Crowther's head, and tea-leaves and liquid streamed everywhere about him.

We had all acted without premeditation: spontaneously; but we seemed to have worked comprehensively; not one of us but had been through the mill. Slumgullion snatched a damp towel and knotted it; others of us did the same.

"Out on deck!" we shrieked. "Feed the mill!" And out on deck we burst like maniacs; our high spirits running riot—we formed in line and sent the youngsters down that line, ducking and dodging and yelping; and when they had gone through the maze of flickering towels we sent each other down. The

mulatto steward, going forward for a yarn with the cook, was caught in the toils; he struggled, he protested, but he was sent whirling along; the cook himself was dragged from his galley, clothed in nothing but a sack about his shoulders; he, too, gyrated down the trap; old Hendrik came to view the sight; ruthless hands grabbed him.

"Feed the machine!" we shouted; and one or two of us looked aft. But we had no real malice against the second mate, although he'd been licked; and Gwen, who was watching us with the insouciant interest of a child, was too sacred to be impelled into that *mêlée*.

"Obstacle race!" we cried, when no more food for the mill was forthcoming, and away we started; up the main rigging, to the main royal, down the backstays, up again forward; out to the jibboom end, in by way of the boom-guys; yelling and laughing—mad for the time being, and taking incredible risks; but enjoying life to the full, until:

"Lee fore-brace!" sounded from aft; and we of the watch on deck had to relinquish our breathless sport and turn to at our lawful work.

Then eight bells went and the watch was relieved; we dragged a blanket and a pillow a-piece to the after hatch and coiled down, with the flaming stars to watch us, with the disappointing Southern Cross rising higher and higher to the south; with a corner of a blanket drawn across the eyes to prevent dreaded moonblindness; and so we slept like the Seven Sleepers themselves, that the sea-creed of work, eat and sleep might be fulfilled to the letter. And the Sabbath was at an end.

Working days differed but little, save that we were kept constantly employed during the deck watches, from wash-down at five-thirty, to sweep-decks at quarter to six at night.

There are always multitudinous tasks to be

performed aboard a windjammer; for the merchant service differs vastly from the Navy. In the latter service as little repairing, rigging and painting as possible is done by the crew proper, though that crew is numbered in scores where we were numbered in units; everything that can be left to dockyard hands is left; but with us nothing that could be avoided was done in port; all that could be undertaken was performed at sea.

There were always sails to be repaired or new ones to be made: and sailmaking was a job for the officers' "white-haired boys"—the favourites, for it was a soft job and an interesting one withal. Instead of wallowing about to the eyes in Stockholm tar or slush; instead of chipping endless iron rust or slapping paint on the scraped metal, the sailmaker donned clean fair raiment and sat on a bench with good clean canvas all about him, and sewed or picked old stitches out of sound cloths, and didn't need to exert himself unduly. And there were interesting matters to watch, too, for the sailmakers were usually established aft, either on the poop itself or on what corresponds to a warship's quarter-deck. At eight-thirty each morning the skipper and mate stationed themselves with their sextants; Gwen at the chronometers below; and took longitude sights—matters of mystery at that stage to us embryo navigators. The second mate would be forward, directing operations there and working himself as hard as any two of the sailors; for we were no "starched collar" ship, where the officers kept the poop and walked the planking in stately isolation. Only in "stand-by weather" and at night did the watch-officer keep a real watch; normally he laboured hard, and the actually sailing of the ship was a secondary consideration. And, being aft on the poop, with the tropical sun blazing down on our heads, and the sweet breezes fanning our cheeks, and the rustle and plash of the water overside to form a gentle, delicious song of movement

and vigour, with the ship clothed in bleached white from royal truck to scupper, and good times all about us, we naturally took advantage of such opportunities to yarn together in low voices, with one eye on the companionway in case the skipper shoved his head on deck to check us, for yarning during the watch on deck is as great a sin in a windjammer as is smoking abaft the foremast. And perhaps, after a while, when we were sure the skipper was safely out of the way, one of us would dodge into the chart-room and take a squint at the old man's navigation book, to try and extract from the sprawled figures and many erasures some idea of our whereabouts—the only knowledge that was granted to us, for in the — we were not favoured, as some ships were favoured, by having the noon position chalked up on the skylight daily; and for all the evidence to the contrary we might have been in any one of the three great oceans.

It was much of a puzzle to us: this secrecy concerning the ship's position: our place on the chart was always jealously guarded from common inspection. Being by nature hostile to the after-guard, we naturally declared that the skipper and the mate themselves didn't know where the ship was and didn't want to give the show away; what harm it could do us to know whether we were a hundred miles north of the line or south of it, we failed to understand. It is a mystery to me to this day—I have never been able to understand the desire for secrecy on the part of old-time navigators; unless it was a survival from still more ancient days when no one was more surprised than the navigator himself if his reckoning came true.

And Gwen would perch herself on the end of the bench and insist on talking about everything under the sun, until she tired of it, and then she would go below and return with a surreptitious cake, perhaps, or a tin of condensed milk which she had contrived

to extract from the steward's stores; or she would ask what mood we were in and get down to her piano and send music to correspond clashing up through the wide-open skylight, where the skipper's canary almost burst its throat in a vain attempt to rival her harmonies.

Then the man who had, say, the ten-to-twelve wheel, would slip away at fifteen minutes to the hour for a draw at his pipe—for smoking during working hours is rigidly forbidden under the red duster; and so the watch would go on, until eight bells sounded and we were free to attend the steward for our dole of limejuice, to go below to salt pork and pea-soup or salt beef and bean-soup, or Fanny Adams and no soup at all; with the potatoes finished and only biscuit to replace them; and then to turn in for a nap or a read—if we were sure the skipper was below taking his post-prandial caulk.

Said the R.N. commander of a "Q" boat recently to the writer, when the question of successful camouflage was raised:

"Let the men carry on in merchant service fashion—exactly merchant service. Let them smoke about the decks, smoke at the wheel, everywhere. We're masquerading as a merchant ship, and the more like one we are the more likely we'll be to hoodwink Fritz."

It was splendid enthusiasm: it came into the same category as that displayed by the actor who blacked himself all over to play Othello.

Said the writer: "Ever studied the merchant service? You could sail under the red ensign for fifty years and you'd never see a forecastle hand smoking abaft the foremast. It isn't done. As for smoking at the wheel—I'd like to see the face of a merchant skipper if a shellback came aft with a pipe."

"You astonish me," said the R.N. man. "I didn't know there was anything in the way of

discipline in that service. I thought the men just loafed about anyhow."

"There's a much tighter discipline in the merchant service than in the Navy," I said. And, as I have tried to explain, there is.

Sailmaking was only one of the many employments found for us; and seldom, very seldom did it come the way of the half-deck, who were the ship's Ishmaels. Normally we were given less specialised tasks to perform; and chipping iron rust was the foremost of these. In a steel-built ship there is always rust, and to prolong the life of the ship it is necessary to deal with the corrosions as they occur; consequently the scraper and chipping-hammer are not long idle. Everything that can be chipped is chipped, from the bands about the royal yards to the stringers in the holds; ay, and down to the very keelson, if the ship is allowed to be empty to the floors for as much as a single day. The rattle of the hammers goes on constantly; it ripples and roars like the clamour of machine-gun fire in a hot action. The anchors are chipped; the great bower cables are man-handled up through the spurling gates and ranged along the decks—but this latter is really an Easting job—and every fragment of rust that can be dealt with is eradicated; the steel beneath it scrubbed smooth with pumice-stone or holystone, and then coat after preserving coat of red lead is applied, so that any ship arriving at a foreign port is generally mottled and splashed with the red pigment as if suffering from a curious plague.

It is a tedious job, leading nowhere in particular, and on account of its lack of variety it causes the watches to pass with almost maddening slowness. One has to adopt curious postures to negotiate the many corners and elbows that are common on ship-board; the dust fills eyes and throat, it mingles with the inevitable perspiration that streams from the skin, and makes a sort of coating to the worker's hide;

and on account of the lack of washing water, cleanliness is practically out of the question. For salt water baths, whilst invigorating, are not cleansing by any means, we found; in fact, they seem to bind the grime more securely in place. No, chipping and scraping were not tasks we loved; we felt they led nowhere, teaching us nothing of our chosen trade; but, though we grumbled bitterly against what we considered the injustice of it all, we did not let our grumbles reach either skipper's or mate's ears, for we had a wholesome respect for both those autocrats. And even had we growled to them it wouldn't have done much good, because they were hidebound by ancient custom which ordained that apprentices should perform all the Cinderella tasks at sea and in port—and get nothing for it.

Still, there were occasions when sailorising tasks came our way—occasions these to be welcomed vociferously. Usually we were bracketed with an experienced A.B., and picked up as much information as we could by questioning; and the Norwegian who owned a certificate as master gave us a rubbing up in navigation now and then which did us no harm; further, he lent us a very ancient copy of an old seamanship manual, compiled by a midshipman in the U.S. Navy of 1799—a very mine of information this quaint volume was; for practically every manœuvre, from furling a royal to securing the weather-gauge when in action with an enemy craft, was backed up by a quotation from Shakespeare or the Bible, and the literary style left Emerson himself amongst the vulgar herd.

Though individual watches dragged, yet the days and weeks flowed along with astounding rapidity; so that the Sundays seemed to crowd fast on each other's heels. There is no place where men assemble together where time moves on so swiftly and uneventfully as aboard a windjammer, I think—a month has gone before one realises it has started.

We carried the good north-east Trade to a point some fifty miles north of the Line, and there encountered baffling light airs and calms—real Doldrum weather. Good opportunities here for working off arrears of washing; we scrubbed blankets and everything we could scrub—working usually by night, for to sleep in a tropical downpour out on deck is not an easy matter; and we lads were not permitted to cache ourselves under the fore-castle head as were the men. Once we had collected all the fresh water we needed, however, from the spouting poop-scuppers, where every tub capable of holding water was placed, the Doldrums lost their interest. There was so much muling work to be done: the yards were braced sharp up, squared and braced round sometimes as often as a dozen times a watch. The ropes swelled and jammed in the blocks; we were never dry; and the atmosphere below was like an everlasting Turkish bath. One wondered where all the rain came from: day followed day of drooping black clouds and lightning flashes and distant thunder, with that remorseless crash and drip of falling water that boiled from the unruffled sea outboard. The half-deck was crammed with wet clothing that set up its own particular steam when the sun did occasionally blaze out with fervent heat for half an hour or so; and our quarters, too, were alive with horrible vermin that we could not eradicate, try as we might. Nights below were a torment of prickly heat and sleeplessness; on deck they were but little better. But we whacked up a vast enthusiasm over crossing the Line, and especially were we second-voyagers expectant, for on the previous outward passage we had been the victims; now, according to the usage of the sea, we were to be the torturers, and human nature being what it is, we anticipated pleasure on the larger scale.

“Wonder whether Gwen’ll go through the mill?” I discovered myself asking Slumgullion as the matter came under discussion.

"Not she," he opined. "The skipper'll buy her freedom with a bottle of grog, as usual."

I wasn't quite so sure, as a result of certain hasty conferences at the wheel; the girl was game, and evidently intended to accept her real baptism to the sea. As, in addition to her, we had four other first-voyagers—at least, four who had never crossed the Line—we anticipated a considerable amount of pleasure. We second-voyagers were especially enthusiastic over coming events, by reason of our own past sufferings.

Years afterwards, at Coney Island, New York's somewhat flamboyant pleasure haven, I happened along with others to be victimised by a blatant "fake show." We were lured into a gaudy saloon, we paid our dimes for entry, and were promised most wonderful sights and experiences. All we had to do was to keep turning to the right; and at each angle of the almost interminable corridor was stationed a brazen-lunged director who egged us on to further inquiry by dint of specious promises. In the result we marched out into the street again without having seen anything whatsoever, beyond bare walls; and—we promptly persuaded others we met to explore those alluring recesses for themselves!

I think it must have been that spirit which prompted us of the —— to desire to put newcomers through their facings: we had suffered ourselves and we wished others to share our lot. Cruel? Yes, but youth is essentially cruel. And we spent quite a good deal of time in conjuring up blood-curdling impressions of what the ordeal would be like when it came. We had young Bubbles and Cameron worked up to a white sweat of apprehension before the eventful day arrived. And the day itself was one of cumulative dread for the youngsters: the air of horrible mystery that enwrapped the ship suggested at least a murder, and possibly mutilation in addition. You could see the youngsters endeavouring to be brave, endeavour-

ing to assume an air of unconcern, when in company with others; but—when they were by themselves you might detect a thin greenish tint running under the flaming tan and crimson of their sunburnt cheeks.

But the ancient and honourable ceremony of crossing the Line has been too often described by abler pens to need further exposition here. Our function was not characterised by any startling originality; and, I suppose, analysed, it was simply a bit of half-impromptu buffoonery got up for the sake of extracting an added ration of grog from the lazarette. Sailormen will do a lot for a drink, as all the world knows; and the amount of preparatory labour necessary to perfect this amateur theatrical effort was considerable: there was more real enthusiasm put into it than usually characterised ordinary labour for the good of the ship and the firm to which she belonged.

But the deed was done. The first dog-watch was declared a stand easy; and those who had the watch on deck rigged a mighty sail beneath the boatskids and pumped it full of salt water; the initiates were chased to security and locked up in the half-deck; we who were figuring as principals in the pageant betook ourselves to the sailmaker's room and there decorated ourselves; the cook and carpenter between them supplied the lather; the Norwegian, who was an officer in his own country's ships, bedecked himself in a long frock coat and, wonder of wonders, a glossy silk hat, together with formidable spectacles, spats and choker, and assumed the rôle of doctor; Neptune, none other than Rhys himself, fashioned a noble crown and wig—the former of a cut-down butter-tin, the latter of ropeyarns; and all attendant satellites robed themselves according to choice; especially Slumgullion, who by reason of a certain suggestion of good looks, was unanimously drawn for the character of Aphrodite. Slumgullion seemed to have spent some profitable moments with Gwen,

if the evidence of his completed toilette carried any weight : but where he secured the pearl-powder and rouge from I should not like to say. Anyhow, he appeared as a rather saucy flapper, and a pretty one at that.

We marched aft, as was customary, after hailing the ship and boarding her by the bows; and saluted the skipper and mate, who were on the poop. These two autocrats quite entered into the spirit of the occasion; and, when Rhys got rid of one or two home-truths concerning the hardness of the daily work and the scantness of the food aboard, the skipper only laughed at the licence shown.

"There are four candidates," he told Rhys.

"By secret information, I make it five, noble captain," said "Neptune."

"Oh, but the young lady buys herself off, as is permitted," was the skipper's rejoinder. And he shouted for the steward, who came nimbly with a bottle of fixed-bayonets whisky, at sight of which one heard anticipatory lip-smacking. Slumgullion grinned at me when the bottle was delivered to Neptune's charge.

"Gwen's a woman," he whispered, with an affectation of knowledge. "Doesn't know her own mind for two hours together."

"Well, sir, being that the young lady's done the handsome," Rhys spoke out, "there's nothing for it but to pass her free." And, with chanties and grotesque gyrations, we left the break of the poop and moved to the scene of torture.

Bubbles and Cameron went through the mill gamely : a bit white, perhaps, and trembly in a small degree, but they made no attempt to shirk their obligations. It was different, however, with a forecastle hand, named Benson. This man was something of an enigma to all aboard. He was of a low type, but claimed friendship with the skipper. He was foul of body and, if possible, fouler of speech; both his outer

man and his soul were insanitary. He was a loafer; he was the one man aboard that chummed up with Frenchy; he was dishonest, and seemed possessed of not one single decent trait. We others had it that he was a wife-murderer who had been smuggled out of the country secretly to escape the penalty of certain hideous crimes; and the reason for his apparent hold over the skipper, we agreed, was undoubtedly because Benson and the captain had been implicated together in all the crimes of the Decalogue, from ordinary burglary to barratry, and from body-snatching to baby-farming.

Benson had announced, with no little truculence, that he would see the whole ship's company in the hottest corner of hell before he would submit to the indignity of facing Neptune and earning the freedom of the seas. Frenchy, desirous of cadging matches and soap from me, had informed me in confidence that Benson meant to be ugly. We had, as a consequence, prepared for him; an especially nauseating dose of medicine, particularly poisonous "lather," and even an especially rugged razor, were all stored up against the occasion.

Benson was at least as good as his word. He barricaded himself in the paint-locker when the time for action came. We promptly rigged a hose, thrust the nozzle through the paint-locker port, and turned on the full force of the head-pump. He found cover behind an oil-tank; but we burst down the door and went in to find him. He bombarded us with paint-cans, oil-drums, anything he could lay his hands on; and then, with a sheath-knife drawn, dared us to touch him. He was really nasty—you can tell when a man is not thoroughly in earnest and when he is. As not one of us cared to risk a stab—and the man's eyes were full of malice—he managed to charge through us; but a wad of paint-filled waste caught him sloppily in the face, the knife was wrenched from his grip, and he was haled aft; only to break away at the

fore-rigging and to dash aloft like a scared monkey. Then began a chase which beat all our previous gymnastic efforts. Benson was not going to be taken easily; he performed miracles of agility. But he was one against a dozen; and in the long run he was scotched off—by the simple process of letting go a rope to which he was clinging and bringing him down on deck by the run; after which he was picked up ungently and run aft to the seat of judgment.

Be very sure he gained nothing by his defiance; especially so since he refused to accept his gruel even then; he bit and kicked and scratched incessantly, and the black filth that poured from his lips was even blacker than the lather we crammed into his mouth by way of a plug.

Our sport had been good-natured, if somewhat rough-handed, until Benson's turn; but before very long some of the more excitable of us were getting too much in earnest, and Benson would have undergone some real rough-housing if the skipper, sensing the spirit that was growing, had not interposed. Scrubbed with brooms, scraped with raw-edged hoop-iron, dosed with the unspeakable pills our "doctor" had concocted, smeared everywhere with tar and slush, Benson was ultimately allowed to go free; and he went forward spitting like a scalded cat, declaring vengeance on all hands. But he had found that it is no healthy matter to arouse the anger of a score of fairly healthy seamen who, whatever their faults, are generally sportsmen to the core.

And as he passed into obscurity, what should happen but that Gwen should appear, clad in bathing dress, with her splendid hair tightly enclosed in a waterproof cap! She was a bit pale, but quite determined; she came straight towards our awe-inspiring Neptune on his throne, and demanded the real freedom of the seas.

"You're free, missy," Rhys told her. "Your dear, kind papa saw to that."

"Oh, yes, I put him up to that," said the girl. "I thought an extra tot of grog wouldn't do anyone any harm. But that isn't really crossing the Line, you know."

So she, in her turn, was sounded as to physical fitness; but the nauseating pill the others had swallowed was missed—the doctor found the lid had come off the pill-box!—and although she was shaved and ducked, she escaped very lightly, as such a thorough-going sportswoman deserved.

It was dark by the time the ceremony was over; the night was breathless and oppressive. We, who had toiled—I myself was barber—were dripping with perspiration; but we dragged Neptune and his consort aft and sang a vigorous chanty at the poop-break, until the cry of "Steward!" sounded; and the usual compliments were paid. Then we trooped forward and held a sing-song—a proper sing-song; wherein each member of the crew forward had to tell a yarn or sing a song or do something to account for his existence. Weird and wonderful were the results.

Rhys opened the game by singing "After the Ball"; and when he had quavered to his long-drawn finish, he told half a dozen screamingly funny stories that caused our sides almost to split. Benson was next called upon, and it was apparent that his recent handling had brought him to no better frame of mind, for he sang an obscene song that had not even mirth to recommend it—a long, slimy outpouring of unadulterated filth, which was brought to a premature conclusion, when one of us noticed Gwen approaching through the shadows, by the expedient of ramming a half-full bucket of sand and water over the perpetrator's head.

Song after song followed—not a sea-song amongst them all. Thick, cloying sentiment was the prevailing note: "The Blind Boy's Lament" led to "Two Little Girls in Blue," and not until late along did the carpenter give us "The Ship I Love," which was re-

ceived critically, as real-life skippers do not address their crews in the manner assumed by non-seafaring composers.

Then Bubbles was called upon, and in a husky bass, which occasionally squeaked into an appalling treble, blushing and confused, he commenced, "The Ship That Never Returned."

"No, by God! you don't!" shouted Rhys. "Not that song, my son."

"I vonce sail in schip where feller sing dat song," said a Swede; "an', by gar, she neved *did* return." Superstition was awakened; these men were quite in earnest. Twenty-five years ago steam had not entirely killed those ancient fears of sailormen; it was still unlucky to sail on a Friday, to carry a parson to sea, to shoot an albatross. Bubbles stammered and blushed—he must have crimsoned to his waist-line, I think—and then piped out the song that brings huskiness to the throats of real sea-lovers, that unchains their tongues and opens their lungs: "Spanish Ladies." How we sang it, from the commencement until we struck soundings in thirty-five fathom; and cast loose shank-painters and let go our ring-stoppers, and performed all the mysteries of rounding to our anchors in safe home-port at last!

Then Faulken, our full-throated chantyman, caused the royals to flutter and thud to his rendering of "Paul Jones"; and Gwen came nearer and leaned against Slumgullion and this present writer, and we could feel the ardent young heart of her beating against our arms; and as the last stentorian stanzas stilled and died, we two dragged the girl into the pallid circle of light cast by a hurricane lamp, and demanded that she too should join the revels.

She was nothing loath. She linked her hands behind her, and lifted her face, and sang, without fear or affectation, the fine old capstan chanty: "Rolling Home"; sang it faultlessly, and gave every sentiment in that inspiring ditty its true value; so that we could

hear the fresh gale booming and rumbling high aloft in the rigging; we could hear the thresh of the driven sprays and the shudder of the comber-pounded hull. Did we join in the chorus? Did we not? We all sang, those with voices and those without; we roared until our throats were like to crack, until we regretted that the last drop of grog had disappeared an hour before.

"Encore, encore!" came from us all as the last verse finished; ay, even Benson joined the shouting. Gwen laughed, but I saw that her eyes were shining with something besides pleasure. She was all an emotionalist; and this torrent of approval touched her deeply. She crinkled her brows as she searched her memory for something to suit the occasion, and then, as we expected another brave song of the sea, what did the little vixen do but pipe up with, "The King of Love My Shepherd is," and sing it through with most astonishing expression—through to the last line, with never a falter; and—not a sound was heard to interrupt that very perfect rendering. For perfect it was; the child had a voice like a thrush, as true as steel, and as sweet as honey; and I know that for me the ship disappeared, and the warmth of a distant home closed about the roots of my heart. For that hymn was Home in music.

There was not a man of all those hard-bitten, caloused men but had some soft memory rekindled by the girl's singing; you could see it on their leathern faces, in the sheepish hanging of their heads, in the twitchings of their fingers. Never a one but had some sacred thought within him somewhere, overlaid by the careless years, perhaps, but still the little Divine flame existed, and by the breath of the girl's clear voice the spark was fanned to open flame—to die down again all too soon, maybe, but—I wonder!

There was a throbbing silence as she finished: to call on another singer were a sacrilege. Gwen fell back between us two, her supporters, favoured our

arms with a slight hug apiece, and then slipped away aft. And as her soft footfalls died away :

"Starboard braces !" came the order. "Aft the watch."

The ship was all aback ; a light breeze was blowing from the starboard bow. Our evening of recreation was done ; there was nothing to follow but a resumption of the everlasting box-hauling.

No, though ; there was more purpose in this light draught than in the others that had tantalised us through many days. Could it be ?

It was. By midnight the ship, close hauled, with everything set, was lirting happily along to the south and west with a vigorous south-east Trade buffeting her, with merry wavelets slapping her rusting sides, and the breathless oppression gone for good. We had crossed the Line in proper shape, and the days of pully-hauls were done.

At eight bells as the watches mustered aft, the skipper came to the break of the poop. He was no orator ; he could rap out an order with the purposefulness of a rifle-shot ; and he could dress a recalcitrant down in a style to make his marrow creep, but he owned none of the politenesses of life. He strutted and stammered for a while, and then he said :

"My daughter wishes to thank you fellows for your entertainment. She enjoyed it. She—er—she thinks—er—that is—damn it—Steward !" We cheered Gwen to our hearts' content as the mulatto came running with both hands laden.

CHAPTER XI

RUNNING THE EASTING DOWN

AND almost before we realised what was happening, the chill of the Antarctic was in the rushing breeze; the fine-weather canvas was unbent—Frenchy again retired to his bunk—and the hard-weather sails went up, with extra-stout robands to confine them to the yards and stays; worn chafing gear was replaced, weak places were tested and made strong; doubtful ropes were overhauled and replaced; the whole ship aloft was groomed and tested for the coming ordeal of the Easting.

Now woe betide those who had slacked through the Trades, who had neglected to repair worn places in their oilskins, who had forgotten to wash and dry their underwear; for there loomed before us the possibility of a month and perhaps two of hard going, of strong gales and wet decks, of the everlasting harping of rigging and the droning, stunning clamour of bad weather. Our skipper was a driver, a man who went far south on the Great Circle to pick up strong and favourable winds; we should in all likelihood sight the Antarctic ice before we knew what was afoot, and the promising cold and wet would seek out every weak place in our deep-sea armour.

Rhys, cunning as a shipload of monkeys, had not only fashioned two perfect suits of "oilies" from the sheets supplied; he had also contrived to cajole from the mate an ancient oilskin deck-coat, torn and tattered, sticky and grimy—a very wreck of a waterproof; but he had taken advantage of fine weather to patch and soak and scrub, until he stood forth as the

proud possessor of three bottle-tight outfits, and in the result he ran the Easting down with a dry skin. All the Scandinavians were in similar case; they had left nothing to chance. Their sea-chests were full of clean, dry underwear; their oilskins were guaranteed to endure the most comprehensive of soakings. Others of us were not so lucky. Frenchy had been complaining of his rheumatism for a week past, and it seemed likely that he would hardly require oilskins at all; but we of the half-deck crowd would need all we could get, and—we had let things slide, alas! Our waterproofed clothing had been forgotten when the sun shone, spite of Rhys's remonstrances and warnings—what was the odds, we said. There were other suits of oilskins in the skipper's slop-chest, and the bill would be sent in to our people at the voyage's end.

But the skipper's slop-chest failed to come up to expectations: all the oilskin suits had been taken up earlier in the passage by men with greater foresight than ourselves; there were no sea-boots to replace those we had carelessly worn to ribbons during fine weather out of sheer laziness. We second-voyagers ought to have profited by past experiences, but youth is notoriously careless, and we'd let the whole business of preparation go hang. Too late now to wash and scrape such oilskins as we had and recoat them with boiled oil to ensure their watertightness! Too late to do anything but sew on unseemly patches and cover them with quick-drying paint that would crack within a day of the garments being first worn. By the chin-whiskers of Neptune we vowed never again, never again; but—when we were allowed a ship's tailor in Australia, with credit to the extent of five pounds sterling for replacements in view of a Pacific crossing and rounding the Horn, we commuted the credit for two pounds ten in hard cash, and cheerfully signed statements to the effect that we had received goods to the value of a fiver, and blued the proceeds

in gorgeous feeds ashore, and in the result came home round the Horn bare-webbed as ducks, and chilled eternally to the marrow.

What of it? It did us no real harm, and the mild sin lay lightly on our consciences!

We wondered as the time went on whether our skipper would venture to call at that loneliest of outposts, Tristan d'Acunha, for fresh water and fresh vegetables. We might have saved ourselves the trouble; though all of us, and especially the youngsters amongst the crowd, longed to see this curious land and to study its quaint customs for ourselves.

Rhys had been there—where had he not been?—and he told us some astonishing facts (?) concerning the far-flung rocks.

"'Tis hoatching with weemin," he assured us. "Ten weemin to one man at the least, an' maybe much more. If a sailor's lost off his ship and contrives to swim ashore to that same island, he's married afore he recovers consciousness, men being that scarce!"

To a suggestion that polygamy must be the common law there he shook his head.

"They're of a religious frame of mind, the islanders," he said. "They don't hold with such contraptions. Why should they? One woman's ten times more than one man can manage, so he's a fool and a big fool to saddle himself with more. But there's good fruit and vegetables, if not much meat beyond seal-flesh and goats; and there's no taxes to pay, so far as I know, because there's no money to pay 'em with. Every so often they send a warship from the Cape to call and pay respects, the place being under our flag; an' kind-hearted folk sends gifts. It is a mournful place, with hymns instead of songs, and never a smile. P'raps 'twas my fault I found no smiles—I wouldn't marry the selection of weemin they handed out for approval, no, not one of them. So the weemin got their backs up with me, an' the men follyed suit like the dutiful fellys they were."

The skipper did not call at Tristan d'Acunha, as the sequel proved. The long bout of heavy rains in the Doldrums had enabled us to replenish our water supply, and it was not until we were well down into the Easting that Finch developed his insensate spite against the whole ship's company. All we saw of the island was a suggestion of a solid cloud on the southern horizon; the first glimpse of land we'd had since leaving soundings; and at the time we were hammering along with a full westerly gale behind us, doing a good twelve knots handsomely, and not making too much fuss about it; and no real sailor would be such a fool as to risk losing such a favouring slant as this which promised.

We burst triumphantly into the stormy Indian Ocean, and the grey-backs that had swung clean round the world roared and foamed up beneath our counter and slogged us on as though anxious to have done with this indomitable fabric that the fiercest gales of ocean could not daunt.

Followed week after week of strenuous action, with but little to mark the changing of the days. It was coming towards winter down there, with days that dawned grey and cheerless at somewhere about seventy-three; and that closed in spume and mist and gloom soon after five, and it was necessary to "flog the clock" something like thirty minutes per day to keep the ship's time somewhat approximating the time of that part of the world where we sojourned.

For we were running east and making a good job of it, living in a whirl of hard-thrown spindrift and roaring combers, but thrusting forward indomitably, with a westerly gale that blew with the steady persistency of the Trades a bit on our starboard quarter and the forefoot talking Spanish if ever it did in its existence. Twelve knots an hour was an ordinary speed for the old flat-bottomed warehouse, and that meant well over three hundred miles in the twenty-four hours, whilst down there, far to the south, racing

towards the fringe of the Antarctic ice, the degrees of longitude were only something less than forty miles in length instead of sixty, and, as everyone knows, a degree of longitude is equal to four minutes in astronomical time, which meant that we were gaining half an hour a day on the sun. Each day was only twenty-three and a half hours long; thus it became necessary to "flog the clock" to correspond, and this was always done at night, when no working hours would be interfered with, needless to say; and, as a matter of seniority, in the mate's watch on deck.

A large and a not uninteresting volume might conveniently be filled with stories and descriptions of running the Easting down alone, for that monstrous stretch of sea that runs from Tristan d'Acunha to Cape Leeuin presents problems, dangers and promise of adventure without end. In my day there must have been hundreds of bottoms that took the Great Circle route to Australia—running far and very far south because by so doing the length of the journey was shortened, thanks to the curvature of the earth's surface; but we saw only one sail during the entire run. It is a vastly lonely stretch of sea, and because of the strong prevailing winds, when ships do chance one upon another, the conditions are seldom favourable for signalling. Kipling knew something of the Indian Ocean and its ineffable loneliness when he made McAndrew say:

"Ye've time enough to weld your shaft, aye, eat it, ere ye're spoke." The story of the Easting is the story of countless unrecorded sea disasters; for when you seek the winds you lose the company of the northern waters; and if you find those winds too great to battle with successfully, none but the soaring albatross knows of your ultimate ending.

But there was a bracing invigoration in this sense of splendid movement. We had the power of a steamer without its discomforts—though, as the mist and spray and driving rain continued, we'd have

given the safety of our unthinking souls for the warmth and dryness of a steamer's engine-room and the regular, undisturbed routine that accompanies the journeyings of such ships as owe nothing to the wayward whims of the elements. But it was good to fight a way aft when, at every mid-watch and watch-end, we were summoned to heave the log that the ship's progress might faithfully be written down.

Ginger took the sand-glass, because if he did anything else he generally came to disaster; either he would let the log-reel fall or snarl the line about his mighty sea-boots, which he wore religiously though they leaked at every seam, or perpetrate some previously unheard-of *gaucherie*. One of us oldsters would get the log-reel from its beackets on the poop-rail, the watch would lay aft in readiness to haul in, the second mate tore off a few coils of the measuring line, carefully spit on the peg that fitted into the spittlefreece, complete the connection that made the logship an upright triangle, capable of remaining motionless in the water as the ship sped on, and shout to Ginger to be ready.

"All ready, sir," came Ginger's reply. Over went the stray-line that should carry the logship clear of the eddies of the wake; a fragment of white rag flashed over the rail.

"Turn!" shouted the second greaser. Ginger would turn the glass if he didn't happen to be watching the manœuvres of an albatross or the chattering Cape pigeons that busied themselves about our wake, or a sinister, gloomy "stinker"; and presently he would recollect himself to shout "Stop!" as the last grain of sand ran out; whereupon the second mate clapped his weight on the roaring, humming line that was charging out over the taffrail, and the whole watch would find themselves hard put to haul the thing aboard. To watch that light rope flying over the rail gave one a splendid sense of speed and invincibility: time after time the line ran clean out to the bare end before the

last sand grain was exhausted, as sign and proof that the old faggot was smoking through it at a clean fourteen. But generally the knot that indicated twelve decent sea miles per hour was just in the water, and—it wasn't so bad considering everything. We never posed as being a clipper, and when Rhys assured us solemnly that the *Emily Nicholson*, famous clipper as she was, the ship that sighted Sydney Head fifty-nine days after leaving Falmouth, had been compelled to have brass plates fitted to her teakwood taffrail where the log-line passed overboard, because without that protection the chafe of the swift-running cord invariably set the hard wood on fire, we pointed to the whirling wake astern and jeered in his face.

Not that the ship was as comfortable as an Atlantic liner by any means; and the further south we went the less comfortable she became. It was bitterly cold, for one thing: it was growing colder; and the southern seas had only boisterous welcoming for us. Running as we were, the afterpart of the ship was constantly drenched, first by beating spindrift, later by solid water that cascaded with purposeful earnestness over the main braces and swirled and battered everlastingly about our half-deck. To open the door meant skill—unless speed and dexterity were employed the incomer ran a big risk of bringing a drenching sample of the Indian Ocean in with him; the outgoer was usually clipped savagely in the teeth by a wave-crest. Skill beyond the ordinary was required to bring the meals aft from the galley; by common consent Slumgullion and myself permitted the faithful though clumsy Ginger to take a holiday from his "Peggying" duties after he had lost one breakfast, one dinner and one supper in consecutive attempts. It was his elephantine sea-boots that brought him to grief on each occasion: those and his habit of day-dreaming under the crest of a falling avalanche of water. We pulled the boots off his feet and dispatched him forward barefooted; but he found the

water-logged lee scuppers just as surely; and as food was our only solace during such drastic days, we decided that in the interests of the common weal more expert hands and feet should be employed.

But we did not fare nearly so well now, for Ginger's blandishments, which could charm an infinite amount of delicacies from the "Doctor," were not ours; we were prone to grumble openly to his sable cookship, and finally we effected the happy combination of sending Ginger to the galley to do the diplomatic work which charmed the luxuries from the son of Ham, and waylaying him by the donkey-room door to ensure his prizes safe passage to the half-deck.

It was now that our number one royals, with wire leaches and feet, proved their worth. We carried them when lighter canvas would have been blown to ribbons, and always the wholesome tale of knots went on—increasing a little as grey, noisy squalls came rioting up astern in banking blackness, diminishing as the squalls exhausted themselves and eased the steady bite and tang of the westerly gales to something approaching a breeze for an hour or so.

Aloft at the moment there was but little work to be done, thanks to the mate's preparedness. Chafing gear had to be renewed, robands had to be rove in the sails' heads to bind them more tenaciously to the jackstays as the constant strain chafed them through; the braces had very occasionally to be tautened; but the trim of the yards hardly altered from week-end to week-end. Good, rousing weather, with the keen Antarctic tang in the atmosphere all about us; though older men spoke of coming miseries when the wind would haul to the south'ard and bring with it biting sleet and hail and, worse still, loose ice, though by all the laws that sinister menace should have been securely locked to its parent ice around the continent's shores.

Not that we were permitted to loaf—perish the

thought! We were kept actively employed, for it was not considered "stand-by weather" yet; a whole watch would go by without any variation of any kind, beyond the heaving of the log. No, our officers saw to it that Satan was unemployed during those rushing days of briskness. Sailmaking was carried out much as usual, except that Sails had fixed himself up under the forecastle head alongside the great windlass, where he used to sew with slavelike diligence and at the same time descant furiously on the tyranny of those ruling classes whose fiat had driven him into his exile. And the spinning jenny was fetched up from the forepeak; old ropes were robbed of their sound inner yarns and remade into new ropes; sennit by the mile was plaited; bag-o'-wrinkling stuff, paunch-mats, sword-mats, foxes, robands—a hundred things were made; and a thousand yarns were interchanged as well. Crowther, who would act as donkey-man in port, was turned to to clean and overhaul boiler and winch, and worked luxuriously in dryness. We made open fulsome love to him so that we might hang our dripping garments in his sanctuary to dry, and he, the cunning fellow, would wait until there was a whole slopshop full of duds hanging all over the place, and then suggest to the mate, who was his foreman, that he thought the boiler would be none the worse for testing by fire to see if the leaks were all overcome. Result—a few journeys to the forepeak and the carrying of some coal, a roaring fire in the donkey-house, warmth and dry clothes for all the half-deck crew, and—the discovery of more leaks that necessitated a fresh fire at a later date, until the skipper tumbled to our scheming and put his foot down on this wasteful expenditure of fuel, which must have cost the owners at least ten shillings a ton!

We could see no virtue in the donkey-engine whatsoever, except under these conditions. Forward and aft, we alike hated the contraption, for it was the hallmark of shipowners' parsimony, in our opinion. By

virtue of this installation the working crew had been reduced by five A.B.'s—though only the good lord of deep-water men and the Board of Trade knew why. At sea, where men are needed, the donkey-engine was never employed; but the reduced crew had to perform the work of the missing five men notwithstanding.

"The damned donkey can't go aloft," said Rhys, when we discussed the matter one dog-watch that he decided to spend with us instead of curling into his bunk. "It's the biggest injustice ever practised at sea, that same donkey. When I think of the days when a ship of this size would carry fifteen A.B.'s in a watch, aye, and more; when you could shorten her down to a reefed main topsail without calling out the watch below, it's enough to make the moorings of my heart ache. A windjammer nowadays is no windjammer; she's a—a—what's the word? A therman-tidote, eh? She carries a steamer's crowd without a steamer's engines, and makes a workhouse of herself from signing on to payin' off."

Rhys was a real British shellback: he growled at everything now, on principle, as he said, lest the afterguard should think they'd got a soft thing. But when the call went out for a man to fare out to the flying jib when that kite was hauled down and the ship was stabbing with her bowsprit as though determined to probe the hither deeps of the sea and burying her entire forepart in a smother of dragging water, it was generally Rhys who was first out on the boom-guys, just as he was first aloft and last down when all hands were ordered up to hand a slatting topsail that had parted its clews and was frapping itself to ruin in the driving, ice-laden squall.

"I was cast away down in these waters once," Rhys told us, as a crashing greyback lifted itself aboard and slammed at the donkey-room door. "In a whaler I was—a hard-case packet, if ever there was one. Away there on the Crozets." He nodded

vaguely towards the west. "If there's aught in what the devil-dodgers say, I ought to go straight to Heaven when my time comes; I've had purgatory enough. Phew!

"The mate killed the sailmaker that trip—hit him on the head with a setting-fid, and the skull of the man splintered like windy glass when a stone's hove at it. For no reason, so far as we could see. It was just the make of him, though he could handle a whale-boat second to none—second to none. A New Bedford man he was, with knuckle dusters on every hand and a revolver in every pocket. When one or two of the best-minded of us went aft for satisfaction, we found ourselves lookin' down the muzzles of two pistols as big as these hundred-ton guns the Navy folk talk so much about; an' he blew the ear off my watchmate, Spencer. I wonder where old Jack Spencer is now? Last I heard of him he skinned out from a ship in Vallyparaiso, an' took up with a Chilano wench that had been married fourteen times before to my certain knowledge." He showed his usual tendency to drift off into reminiscences of his one-time shipmate, and we said nothing to bring him back to the main theme, though Heaven knows a shipwreck on the Crozets, a murderous mate and such trimmings promised entertainment enough for a dozen dog-watches!

"That was the ship where the skipper died at sea, outward bound to Port Pirrie, and the skipper's wife that was aboard wouldn't let him be decently buried in a bit of an old royal, with a couple o' holystones by way of ballast, but would have him buried in the ballast in the hold—did I say she was goin' out light?—and though the chief mate disliked the idea of sailin' shipmets with a cold corpse, she was a managin' woman who carried her point; aye, did she, an' sued the mate for breach o' promise, too, when the ship got home. Though it was she proposed marriage to him, if I know aught—else he did it when he was

drunk, which was often the case arter the old man slipped his cable.

"Such a man, such a man! They put him in command by cable from home when the ship made port, and he took her round to Sydney to pick up wool and tallow. Then he started off home; but goin' across the Pacific he falls short o' liquor, so what does he do but make a course for Vallyparaiso, an' there he comes to an anchor, lowers away the two lifeboats, has them taken ashore, an' sells them for grog—such as he could get. A wasteful man! So, to be upsides with him, as sellin' what wasn't ours or his seemed to be the fashion, what does Jack Spencer an' me do but watch a chance an' light out with the pinnace, the one decent boat we had left, and off ashore we goes with that an' sells it to Happy Jack, the man that took the handles off'n his own mother's coffin an' sold them; an' next thing we knew we were in the calaboose, with heads on us like the capstan, an' not a stiver of the price of the pinnace in our pockets, and us told off to sweep the streets till the skipper bailed us out.

"Not that he was over-anxious to do it, us being topsides with him over the boat; he owned up to it later, though, that he was the father and mother of all fools to leave us the chance, an' sold the gig to put temptation out of our way. But Jack Spencer bolted off with that Chilano woman—she'd given him a drink whilst he was street-sweepin' an' thirsty as a wooden god—an' though I tried to find him an' persuade him back aboard, him bein' more or less married to a gal at home, it warn't no manner of use. Poor Jack. There was plenty to tell me about the wench he'd married, though. Jack didn't like children, an' his Chilano widow handed him out a round dozen arter they was spliced!"

"What about the Crozets, though?" we asked as the A.B. seemed inclined to grow meditative over the hard fate of his one-time shipmate.

"Oh, them! Rotten place, I call 'em. All fog an' rain an' hair-seals an' albatrosses an' penguins an' such. Time I speak of there weren't no caches of provisions established there, as they've got nowadays. Man-o'-war goes down occasionally to look over the stores—salt-beef, tinned stuff, oddments like that, in case shipwrecked parties get stranded there without grub; but they tell me it ain't always possible to send boats on account of the swell.

"We had to fare as best we could on seal-blubber an' pelicans; uncommon fishy in the taste they was. Didn't get too many o' them, either—we was skin an' bone, an' we was mortalation afraid we was growin' gills and feathers when we was picked up. Now, if that hard-case mate had only happened along with his six-shooters, him that let on to be such a fancy shot, we might ha' got more to eat, but bein' as how someone clipped him under the ear when the masts went by the board—and it might ha' been Jack Spencer, or it mightn't—well, that bein' so, he wasn't there."

We were almost dancing with eagerness now, as might be imagined. Here were astounding curtains being partly lifted on amazing happenings, sufficient to give us trivial, tantalising glimpses of a dozen swiftly moving dramas, but Rhys dropped those curtains after we had secured one vague peep with aggravating indifference.

"But though she was a hard-case ship, that whaler," he said, "there wasn't nothing the matter with the bread, no, nor the coffee. Her cook had been a chef in a New York restoorang, but had been compelled to go into hidin' 'long of a scrap he had with some feller—about a woman, he said. It's generally a woman that sends good men to sea or to the devil. There was a bit of a girl I knew in Peel; me being fishin' then——"

He wandered off into Boccaccio-like reminiscences which had nothing whatsoever to do with the Crozets

or whaling or shipwrecks, save the shipwreck of a man's early ideals, and we fumed and fretted unavailingly. But when one bell sounded aft he grinned and sucked purposefully at his empty pipe.

"That's why I hate the Crozets," he said. And we were no wiser than before. "Maybe I'll tell you about that shipwreck another day; but it's my next wheel, an' here goes for soul-an'-body lashin's, my hearts of oak."

But on a later occasion he told us the entire story, and it was a wild one enough, a tale of uncomplaining heroism, almost epical in its simple splendour. I wish I might do justice to this man's yarning. I think I can see him now, leaning back inside the donkey-winch, as it were an armchair, his bare, hairy arms, tattooed from knuckles to shoulders, folded, puffing away at his two inches of blackened clay, with a shrewd twinkle of mirth in his keen grey eyes, his sou'wester lashed backside foremost on his head, and a two weeks' stubble on his chin, yarning away at stories that would give the novelists a fit of the staggers by reason of their sheer incredibility, though every one was less than truth; and we, eager listeners, our young, grimy faces revealed by the guarded flicker of a purloined hurricane lamp, drinking in every word, and repining youthlike against the monotony and lack of romantic adventure in sea-life as it was lived those days.

Rhys's whaler—the *Nantucket* by name—was blown far out of her reckoning in an Indian Ocean typhoon of historic immensity; she was ridded of some of her spars and became unmanageable. She struck on an outer reef of the lone, dreaded islands at midnight, driven on to the hideous fangs by the full force of the gale.

Presumably some of the crew decided that this was a ripe hour for wiping off old scores against the after-guard—the *Nantucket* was a very hell-ship of the vilest type, where men were triced up and flogged, or

keelhauled or even shot for trivial offences against discipline—for the bucko mate lost the number of his mess in the confusion, and the skipper gathered a broken thigh and collar-bone, whilst the second mate was swept overboard by a following wave and smashed to jelly in the hell-broth that raged overside. Such survivors as remained contrived to win a way to precarious safety through the fog and smother—there were but a baker's dozen of them, including the redoubtable Jack Spencer, who, according to our informant's account, was a curious combination of Sir Galahad and the whole Swiss Family Robinson—and then, for a clear nine months they existed precariously, without sighting so much as a single sail on those desolate horizons, that were everlastingly narrowed in by the prevailing sea-fogs. Not even an outlying whaler hove in sight to give them hope and faith that they existed on a peopled planet.

"God! it was lonely down there," said Rhys. "Seemed like as if the whole round world had been washed out an' only us stopped behind."

There was nothing romantic about that adventure; all was grime and privation and downright suffering. The ex-crew of the *Nantucket* were drawn from all classes; all of them, including the chef, had been shanghaied aboard before the vessel left New Bedford, as, owing to her unsavoury reputation, no free men would sign her articles for a voyage, and her captain had to resort to the old bad method of bribing boarding-house masters and crimps to supply him with his needful personnel. Rhys interrupted his narration at this point to give a long, somewhat blasphemous account of the ways of the shanghai-ing fraternity, which account did not altogether lack interest. He told of men deserting a ship immediately she arrived in port, and being reshipped aboard the identical vessel forty-eight hours later, minus a two months' advance of wages and most of their clothes; he told of dead men being carried to bunks in ships'

forecastles, and blood-money being claimed for them. He was interesting in all his phases, but keenly interesting when he discoursed of the bitterness of the sea.

Then he consigned all crimps and men of their breed to the nethermost deeps of hell and went along to tell of his shipwreck.

"Rum lot they were, most of 'em," he said. "Didn't know much about lookin' after themselves, though ye'd have thought they might ha' learnt after eighteen months in that floatin' coffin. 'Twas Jack Spencer an' me built the huts—out o' driftwood such as was washed up; 'twas us trapped the birds an' hunted the seals. Never a match to be got, by this and by that, until the mate's body was washed up, an' he'd a small few in a glass bottle, him bein' a careful sailorman if a bully; an' we got a cooked meal for the first time after we'd raided him. We sort o' felt we was bein' repaid for the times he'd give us aboard when we cuddled round that fire, lit wi' his matches.

"But we two, Jack Spencer an' me, got fed up wi' lookin' after the rest like's they was babies, an' we told 'em so; then they started fightin'—nasty fellers, most of 'em. Such as had knives used 'em, till Jack he sailed in with an oar loom an' flattened the worst of 'em out. Talk about your democracies, with every man as good as another—it don't work. It can't work. There was the beginnings of as fine a democracy as ye could wish for—all on us equal—but inside a month Jack Spencer he was king or president or suchlike, an' I was Prime Minister. Then we was picked up by a windjammer that had seen our signal, an' fust thing that happened was one o' them Paddy Westers laid an information agin us for murderin' the carpenter, who'd done his d—dest to stab Jack an' me when we caught him pinchin' more'n his whack o' grub. But we saw to him fast enough afore he could do much damage."

"Did you kill the carpenter?" "How did you

scupper the fellow who laid the information?" were two of our questions.

"I s'pose we did, in a way o' speakin'," Rhys said, shredding beautifully cut tobacco into his palm. "We clubbed him when he got his knife in between my ribs—here." He ripped up his jersey—free gift from Cameron—tore out his shirt, and revealed a raking scar across his lower chest: a grim sight enough. "Maybe we hit harder'n we intended, but we had the idea that either one of us two was more useful to the rest than him."

"But how did you spike that other fellow's guns?" Rhys winked solemnly, as he applied a match to his filled pipe.

"Spotted a man I knew when the ship that picked us up reached port. A boardin'-house runner he was. Explained matters to him, and he fixed it. The chap that was goin' to lay his information got a drink or two an' went ashore; an' he was shipped aboard an outward bounder afore he wakened up."

Rhys grinned suddenly: it was as though his face had bent in the middle.

"So was me an' Jack Spencer," he added. "The beggar hocused us, too, an' signed us on in a worse packet than that d——d New Bedford whaler." He judged this a fitting moment to terminate the séance!

But to give even a brief résumé of the man's yarns as spun in a dozen quaint places would be to usurp space that is necessary for the recounting of sea-battling on great waters.

Two days after he told us the veritable history of his casting away we sighted our first iceberg of the voyage. We youngsters had heard much of "ice-blink," and Rhys and other expert whalers had told us that ice invariably gave off a sort of sheeny luminosity that made its presence apparent in the dark, but we, being young, were naturally sceptical. That a frozen substance like ice could give off radiance of its own devising we did not believe. But when the

watch was relieved at four o'clock on the morning in question, to the customary orders of "Watch on deck keep aft, watch below keep handy for a call, relieve the wheel and lookout," was added a further warning:

"Keep a good lookout for ice."

It was my lookout, and because the wind had worked round to the south and was still blowing hard the upper sails had been furled as the gale came abeam; the lookout had been removed from the fore-castle head, which was constantly swept by sprays and whole water, and stationed on top of the fore-house. Here, under the lee of the furled main-top-mast-staysail, was something in the nature of shelter from the beat of spindrift.

As I climbed to the house-top, I noticed a new chill in the air; the bite of the breeze seemed to penetrate to the marrow. The man I relieved, a Dane, admitted that he was wearing three suits of under-clothing, as well as various "lammies" and outer garments, and he admitted the fact with chattering teeth.

"Gotta keep good lookout for ice," he said. "I t'inks it close by—ver' cold, no."

It was very dark, so dark that the eyes ached with the effort to see even the ship's bows, which were only faintly visible against the phosphorescent sheen of the whirling sprays. A bit of inevitable sea-fog hung about, too—it swirled from the faint glow of the sidelights, which, for a wonder, were lit. In cheese-paring ships, where even a drop of oil is counted of surpassing value, sidelights are occasionally not exhibited when in waters where traffic is but seldom encountered. The saving of oil consequent upon this disregard of the laws of navigation is esteemed of greater importance than the added risk of collision or disaster. Sailors were cheap, oil costs good money, hence the economy.

Now, a windjammer amongst floating ice is peculiarly helpless, especially when she is progressing at

a fair rate of speed. A steamer is better off—if in doubt as to the actual presence of ice, she can always blow her whistle and wait for an echo, estimating her distance from the danger by the simple expedient of taking the time between blast and echo, dividing it by two, and then allowing a thousand-odd feet for every second of the result. In the event of running too near to ice, she is easily under control and can be so handled as to extricate herself from her perilous plight. With a sailing ship it is different; she carries no sound-signals of any worth—the bray of a hand foghorn can often not be heard on the poop when the operator is on the forecastle head; and, unless the ice is directly ahead or to windward, the windjammer cannot be handled like a picket-boat. Therefore it may be understood that home thoughts and the varied private feuds of shipboard life, the problem of the quality of the next meal, the estimations of the length of passage, the recital of rules of the road at sea, and the refurbishing of one's brain in so far as trifling navigational problems were concerned, did not occupy my thoughts to any great extent. Normally, during the lookout, where the eyes only are employed, and those but cursorily in open water, the mind becomes detached and embarks on wondrous and intricate mazes of thought, from the stars above to the sea-caves beneath, from the port ahead to the garden at home, touching on everything that lies between such extremes. This morning I thought of ice, and of but little else, because there was ice in the edge of the wind, there was ice in the sprays that rattled like grapeshot on one's oilskins. I strained my eyes to bursting point, but nothing save unrelieved gloom revealed itself.

Quarter to five came; Ginger relieved me for coffee. He was heavy with sleep, having discovered some sheltered corner where slumber was possible; but a cutting wisp of spray wakened him effectually, and he paid close attention to my warning anent the possi-

bility of sighting icebergs. Numbed, I hurried aft, dodging one whole sea and coming into damping contact with another; and the piping hot decoction was grateful in the extreme.

"Old Ginger's as blind as a bat, too," said Slumgullion, who had himself been relieved from the wheel. "It's God help us if any ice happens along while he's up there." I had thought the same, and swallowed the scalding stuff hurriedly, clapped a biscuit in my pocket, and ran forward again.

"Nothing, Barnacles, absolutely nothing," Ginger told me.

And as he was shambling away to the iron ladder that communicated with the deck, I saw almost dead ahead a queer lightening of the gloom, a curious ghostly glimmer that was not so much a glimmer as the suggestion of one. And I heard something also—a sound beating against my ear-drums that was different from the customary voice of storm and wind-hounded seas. It was like the distant crash of surf on a low-lying pebble ridge, a dull muttering thunder, infinitely awe-inspiring.

To my own senses it appeared as though my yell of "Ice right ahead!" was the feeblest whimper that ever left mortal lips. It was ice—no getting away from the fact: the ghostly shimmer was increasing; it was like a slow dawn breaking in one portion of the sky alone.

The second mate heard my hail, which I repeated in varying screams. And his roar of:

"Aft, the watch, weather main braces!" came beating back to my ears. The watch-officer had done the only thing possible: he had thrown his helm hard up to allow the ship to run away before the wind; but the lee clews were thundering and flapping ere the yards were squared to starboard, and the ship was gybed to bring the wind on the other quarter. It was not a hair's-breadth escape as it turned out; we were still a couple of miles from the berg when I saw

it; but as the ship's speed was something like eight knots at the time, it is extremely likely that, had we not decided to relieve Ginger at the earliest moment, disaster might well have overtaken us. A quarter of an hour—the allotted time for a relief—would have been sufficient to pile the fabric high on one of the far-jutting spurs of that frigid island; and—boat-work in that kind of weather is anything but exhilarating!

Now, as the ship swung away to run parallel with the giant berg, it was possible to obtain some idea of its magnitude and real existence. The darkness still held, but there was no further questioning of the actuality of "ice-blink"; for the whole vast mass was outlined in a dim unreal glow. And, whether because of distorted fancy or what, it is difficult to say, it seemed as big as a continent, mountainous, endless. Antarctic bergs are huger than their fellows of the northern waters; this one was a very giant of his class. When the slow dawn came it was still plainly in evidence: the second mate told me later that he estimated it to be fourteen miles long and at least eight hundred feet out of the water. That is to say, that a trifle of some five thousand six hundred feet remained covered by the sea, since it is estimated that a berg floats seven-eighths submerged. If our ship had hit this glacial island it is easy to imagine that the honours of the engagement would have remained with the berg.

The great mass was fissured where the laggard sun had played on it; it possessed tall and infinitely graceful spires that, at the increasing distance, gave it the semblance of a very beautiful cathedral: there were pointed roofs and apses and towers without end, so that, aglow in the sun which shone out at the opportune moment—Nature being a cunning stage-manager—it was possible to conceive of it as a fairy city, a city of a thousand churches, wandering at will about those grey and booming seas as though to bid storm-wearied mariners hope, in that land still existed

at the end of their journeyings, and that at the end of the longest voyage would be found the haven where they would be.

So it drifted into the shrouding fogs and disappeared, and not one of us but breathed the easier for it; whilst Faulken took the opportunity to vie with Rhys as a yarn-spinner, and told us an intricate story concerning a ship in which he once sailed which ran into a very archipelago of floating bergs, the least of which was twice the size of the one we had so narrowly missed, sailed clear into the trap in the dead of night, and had suddenly become becalmed because of the ice towers that were all about; and further, when the dawn came to disclose the realities of the situation, behold the bergs were closing in upon the ship in that terrible "nip" which whaling men dread; and only by the sheerest good luck did the fabric escape the closing gates of doom, for two huge bergs drove down upon her, and met within a hundred feet of her boom end, and there ground themselves to ruin like monstrous furies; and the loose ice fell in showers about the laggard ship, to warn all concerned of what might have been.

A far-fetched yarn we voted it, for Faulken lacked that sense of humour which can make the biggest "twister" seem real and almost ordinary; but later, when rounding the Horn, somewhere about sixty south or thereabouts, we who remained in the ship endured a similar experience, and even at this distant date we sometimes wake o' nights in cold sweats, imagining again that the towering mountains are closing down on us, and that the ship has been halted by the drag of some mighty, invisible hand, to form the necessary nut for those cyclopean nut-crackers.

That same day we sighted a derelict; and of all the hopeless, pitiful sights the cruel sea can present, such a one is surely the most hopeless, most pitiful.

There was nothing picturesque about it; it brought to us no promise of fabulous treasures hidden below

decks in iron-clasped boxes; there was no suggestion of age-old liqueurs in oaken casks in her holds. When first sighted she showed simply as a dark, indistinct object amongst swirling wave-crests; merely a black patch amid much grey and green and milky whiteness; but there was a breaking of the waters about her discernible as our ship surged towards the forlorn thing; and spite of the dimming sprays that rendered glasses of but little worth, it was soon possible to name her for what she really was: a derelict timber-built ship, bottom upwards, battered savagely enough, and only just not sinking, with a curdled raffle of loose wreckage about her wallowing underpart, and a lone albatross sweeping and soaring and circling overhead to complete the picture of desolation made concrete to our eyes.

"Must have hit that berg we sighted," was the general opinion on the fore-deck. But as we drew closer—it being daylight and the derelict a little to windward there was no great risk—it was possible to see that the unfortunate was of a far greater age as a derelict than could be accounted for by the fact of her hitting that berg, which had possibly only been afloat for a few short weeks since it was spewed off by its parent glacier on the Antarctic shores. The bottom was coppered still, but there was a ghastly rent in the metal like a death-wound in a carcass; and that bottom was so plentifully covered with maritime growth that it seemed as though it must have been above water for months, if not for years. And there were other indications, too; as seen with the glass, the timbers revealed through the rent coppering were washed smooth; they were greyed with age. The type of the ship could not be ascertained, though once, when the stray threw up on a wave, prior to squatting soddenly into the trough again, she showed a battered counter, on which still clung fragments of lettering; but neither ship's name nor port of registry could we read.

We had hoped, naturally, that our skipper would heave to and dispatch a boat to make closer inquiry, for we had reached that stage when anything was welcome to break the eternal monotony; but the gale was high and the sea was heavy, and there was really nothing to be gained by boarding that slinking murderer of the seas. Yet it was possible for the fancy to paint weird and wonderful pictures of her life and death nevertheless. Clark Russell's book, "The Frozen Pirate," was aboard us that trip—it was the only book old Hendrik had ever read, and he implicitly believed every single word of it, and swore by the gods of deep water that stranger things a-many had happened to his own recollection—and we could not but share something of the master-romancer's ideas. So, to amuse ourselves, we peopled that sodden forlornness with a red-hatted, pistol-armed crew, and sent her scourging the rich seas of the Indies, entrapping hapless merchantmen, looting them, cutting the throats of their crews and decking themselves out gaudily in all the rarest products of Ind and Europe, snatching fair women to a hideous doom until doom came upon them in their turn at the hands of a blistering tornado that feared the Jolly Roger no more than it feared the White Ensign. She would fight to a finish, we decided, before, her masts shot away and her hull hacked through and through, she capsized and slugged helplessly on the waters she had braved for many a dashing year.

"Father says he is sure that derelict was an old whaler that got jammed in the ice down south," said Gwen, yarning with me at the wheel later on. "He thinks she got lifted up on to a spur of ice and stuck there for goodness knows how long, and then the ice broke away and became a berg, and took the derelict with it until it melted and let it drop off into the sea. He says there was oil still aboard her, because he could see it on the water alongside."

And I have no doubt the skipper was far nearer

the rights of the matter than we youngsters were; though—we still tried to believe our theory was the sound one, because we clung to our youthful illusions with all the tenacity with which we cling to youthful memories nowadays that eld is hoaring the hair.

Anyhow, whatever the cause of her being, there she was; slinking along in sinister wise, visible only in full daylight, and then only at a short distance; a menace to the safety of the seas, a very Hun amongst ships, striking assassin blows to such as should fare her way, for that gash in her copper had very evidently been caused by some gallant ship running hot-foot upon her as she lurched and crouched in the troughs, adding yet one more to the sea's many perils: a foul thing, a very wastrel of the waves; doomed, maybe, to swing clean round the world before dissolution came to her; possibly to follow the biddings of many a current, and—who knows—finally to fetch up in that port of missing ships known as the grim Sargasso Sea.

I think the days of the Easting were tedious for even Gwen; I know they grew bitterly tedious for us. The girl was hard set to find amusement: she had read every book the ship contained; she had hammered her piano into discordant untunefulness; she was not permitted by her father to spend much time on deck, because of the state of the weather; and when, on one occasion, she did escape from the saloon and venture aloft, very daringly, to join us in handing the mainsail, she was so severely reprimanded that she did not venture to essay the attempt again.

Now shipboard for a young girl might be very delightful when that ship is full of handsome, romantic second mates and mates who spend most of their watch on deck in quarrelling over such girl; who dive overboard to rescue her from sharks and so on, in the best romantic vein; but, actually, for a young girl like Gwen, it was lacking in many things. The very

fact of her sex kept her considerably aloof from us boys—who preferred to love in the abstract rather than in the concrete, and who blushed redly and grew confused when Gwen spoke to us; and her father's attitude towards us always created something of a gulf. The second mate was a cad; his sentiments concerning women were well known, and Gwen had long ago discarded all semblance of friendship with him. Her father was no companion: she was a child, he was a man, with nothing in common with her; the mate was disgruntled and patronising when he took the trouble to notice her existence at all, which was not often. A woman aboard ship meant certain extra work; her presence at table limited still more the customary one-sided conversation that goes on at a windjammer's meal-times; and, too, the mate was misogynist enough to believe that the girl watched him and carried yarns to her father—an utterly unfounded assumption, this, for we boys knew that Gwen was as true as steel to a code of honour that was even brighter than the average decent boy's.

She occasionally visited us in the half-deck, and on Sunday evenings would join in our sing-songs, which were carefully bowdlerised for her benefit; and I think those occasional hours were all that made life tolerable for her.

"Don't I just wish I was a boy!" she said frequently. "Boys have all the fun."

We reminded her that some boys might, but that the premium apprentices of the —— didn't, and indicated our gloomy, unclean surroundings, with the dripping oilskins swaying on the bare iron of the bulkheads—we'd ridded the room of its wooden lining in the Trades, and we had painted everything that could be painted, in a futile attempt to rid our quarters of the unauthorised tenants who made hot weather a misery to us; we invited her to compare the miserable slumgullion that was served out to us with the rich

and dainty fare of the saloon; but she was not impressed, and offered to change places with anyone of us. To show her earnestness she knitted us ill-fitting socks, and, growing more ambitious, attempted a jersey, which should be the prize of the one she discovered she liked best when it was finished. And not so very long ago, turning out some old dunnage that had got stowed away in a forgotten garret, what should I come across but the unfinished structure of that heroic jersey—that would have fitted the giant frame of Amyas Leigh himself, had it ever been completed—lying there in a battered old sea-chest that hadn't been overhauled for more years than one cares to remember; so that it would seem that this present writer was the favoured of the half-deck crew at the time when the voyage concluded, which was before the jersey was finished!

But she encouraged us to dream high big dreams; she told us of people she knew who had felt ambition's spur and obeyed its impulse; she drew rosy pictures of the glories of commanding huge Atlantic liners on princely stipends, and even went so far as to cadge her father to give her instruction in navigation so that she could pass it on to us and keep us company in those reluctant studies on which she insisted. So we were none of us any the worse for Gwen's companionship; rather, we were much the better for it, because she checked too careless talk, and fostered better ideals than those we normally had, and taught us that a woman can be good pals with a man, with no disturbing thought of sex to trouble the friendship.

Of course, we all loved her, but it was calf-love, boy's love; that ideal passion that holds in it nothing whatsoever of self. So if the miraculous happens, and Gwen is still alive, and these words fall beneath her gaze, she might remember ancient days, and know that one or two average lads still call down an occasional blessing on her head.

But I think it was the monotony of shipboard life

that permitted her to accept her father's bidding and marry that Chilano merchant when she did.

So we endured the whirling days and the clamorous nights; day by day, week by week, until we were worn in body and soul. Our hands were raw with gaping sea-cuts that all the cunning binding with worsted steeped in tallow failed to assuage, for we were never dry; always we were muling about with wet and heavy ropes. The youngsters suffered no little, too, for they cut and scraped their legs severely every other day, when skimming aloft or toiling about the decks, and the constant wetting fetched the crude dye from their dungarees and inoculated their wounds with the poisonous stuff, setting up horrible salt-water boils that were revolting to look upon. We were grimed with caked salt everywhere, for the weather was too cold to permit of open-air baths, and there was no bathing accommodation under cover; too, the fresh-water supply was giving our skipper grave concern, and our "whack" was already reduced to such trifling proportions that there was not even enough to drink, to say nothing of providing material for decent ablutions.

But we were harder than ever: toughened seafarers; unafraid of work; regardless, I think, of danger.

And so, battered by many gales, yet still stout and fearless, the ship romped on ever to the eastward, and each day was chockful of minute hazards and interesting happenings, although it was not until our perspectives became adjusted that we realised how interesting those workful days could be. The days when we saw the sun were days to be rejoiced in; in the main a grey and gloomy obscurity veiled the waters. Our position was obtained in the main by dead reckoning, for we were now more than three months from home, and only Heaven knew how much our chronometers had varied in the interval. Those were days when wireless time-signals were undreamt

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of, and even had they been existent our parsimonious owners would have refused to supply the ship with an installation sufficient to receive the warnings, because, in their seafaring days, men worked out positions by taking their ships to the desired latitude and then running east or west along those parallels until they found the port of their desire !

Never a friendly sail flecked that enormous, lonely expanse of water—the loneliest stretch of ocean, I firmly believe, in the whole wide world. Empires might have risen or fallen, dynasties might have terminated, the solid world itself might have been swallowed up in flame for all we knew to the contrary ; we were like souls adrift on raw time's seas. Not until we squared away to run northward for the Australian landfall did we sight another vessel : a windjammer like ourselves. A morning dawned to show her abeam ; we'd seen the thin suggestion of her sidelight during the night ; a big four-master ; an iron cargo-warehouse like ourselves, her painted ports—Bubbles was by now too old a hand to be taken in by yarns of possible pirates !—streaked woefully with rust ; with her fore topgallantmast lost overboard to all seeming ; with gaps in her bulwarks to tell of her bitter striving ; she was blustering on doggedly, more under water than over it ; a shuttle in the Empire's loom, bent on her lawful occasions, without trumpet-blowing or banner-waving ; but linking up the Motherland with its outlying Colonies as surely as had she been a golden galleon with sails of painted silk and a crew of laughing cupids.

"One of Brocklebanks," she was named by some ; and then the yarns went about concerning the princely times granted to such apprentices as served under that favoured flag.

"An ordinary seaman to wait on them, meals served as if they were meals, not pigwash ; proper classes in navigation, and apprentices work the mizenmast themselves and learn proper seamanship

there," Slumgullion informed me, not without bitterness. "Same premium as here, too—rotten state of affairs, isn't it?"

She was a noble sight enough; there were force and indomitable courage in the manner in which she defied the slogging seas. From her wave-washed decks we must have presented a similar spectacle, I suppose; maybe those aboard her were admiring and envying us as we admired and envied them. There is, I ween, no sight that stirs the heart of a sailorman more than the picture of a stout ship, shortened down to her topsails and forecourse, ramping through and under the smother of an Easting gale. We hard-bitten sea-fighters tasted those pleasurable thrills that probably assert themselves in the bodies of skilled pugilists watching a worthy fight in the ring.

Chief of all the impressions that linger to this day is one of the perfect freedom of that gallant fabric. She was untrammelled, unleashed; her own mistress in the grim game of ceaseless war. Tied alongside a wharf she would never have aroused a second's interest, because grimy warehouses and clanging railway trucks, sizzling arc lamps, and the crudeness of dockside surroundings were not her proper framing.

But here, in open water, she was adequately placed; her setting befitted her splendour. On she went and on, crashing down into gaping chasms, uplifting giddily, until her bowsprit seemed to menace the low-hanging clouds; now rolling until we saw the full range of her wave-washed decks, again, lurching from us so that we glimpsed the worn, red boot-topping of her lower plates, with the thin runlets of water dripping from every ridge and angle, and whirling away in obedience to the stern hiss of the breeze in feathery spray that mingled with the other spray of her tempestuous wake; with white water drenching her as she swooped and boiling from her as she soared; a living, cunning entity, defiant and

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noble; an embodiment of real pluck, in a word, and a sight to gladden even our jaded eyes.

Ourselves in like case, we marvelled at her gallantry. To us it seemed as though all the waves were conspiring together to defeat her; we could watch their growing run, adding height to foamy height, until towering mountains charged headlong across the foaming smother, and poised, destructive, above that quivering fabric which was like an eager hound on trail. Poised, ay, and fell; but though it seemed the ship could never rise again after the slogging buffets she received, yet she was up and away again, shaking herself restively, straining at the bits, with annoyance evidenced in every tremble of her raking masts. Up and up rolled the greybacks; they broke in shimmering whiteness all about her, so that she might have been floating in a bath of milk, with other hoary-crested monster waves lifting themselves above their fellows' heads as though in eagerness to watch this puny thing that dared them to do their worst. And we could see whole companies of waves join forces as by a common impulse and whirl themselves in ever-growing might higher and higher—until the good ship's tops were blinded, and we held our breaths, expecting the worst, until the gleam of the wet hull showed once more through the murk and drift, and she trod rampantly forward afresh; graceful in her strength, strong in her grace—a windjammer, weaving her purposeful course through the web of an Empire's destiny, with a thousand years of sea history behind her, and the welfare of a nation grown out of such striving as this of hers.

She flung a rusty red duster to her gaff; it fluttered once, and then stood out like a steel plate, rigid and defiant; as a sign to even the most indifferent that Britain still ruled the seas. We did not cheer, because she was only doing her duty, as we were doing ours, we hoped; but we tasted a pride in Empire that did us not the smallest harm, and that, by contrast,

did us good, as the hidden years were to show. It was Ginger who voiced the words that struggled in our throats for utterance. Ginger, bleared of eye through much spindrift crashing in his face, a rag-bag of a figure in tattered, fluttering oilskins and gaping, clumsy seaboots—Ginger, who should have been loafing life away at one of the universities, or learning the elements of warfare on a dusty barrack square.

"I'm very glad my folks didn't make a mistake and live under another flag," he said simply. "Fancy being a German or a Dago!"

Yet we were later to see great German five-masters ramping round Cape Horn under topgallant sails, loaded scupper-deep with nitrates, when we ourselves were down to a reefed topsail, and wondering if the old man would shorten down still further before the Almighty took the matter into His own hands and ridded us of our too great press of canvas!

But our opportunities for sentimental vapourings were too scant. Sighting another ship in this crashing desert was an opportunity not to be missed.

"Lay aft, you boys!" came biting through the clamour that was everywhere about us, and signalling became the order of that day. The four-flag signal that named us was flung to the breeze, with the ensign above it; the stranger responded, and was no longer a stranger. The code disclosed her identity: the *Amethyst*, of London. Not a Brocklebanker after all; no one seemed to know much about her.

"Belongs to a single-shipowning company," said the skipper, busy with Lloyds' List. The *Amethyst* gave us to understand that she was bound from London to Sydney, and was eighty-eight days out from home. That was precisely our own time from port; we had left England on the same day, we had never sighted one another, and here we were, neck and neck to all intents and purposes. Like two lonely spirits adrift in space we had drawn together in companionship, and there was every likelihood that we

should dock on the same tide; probably have to wait for the same tug outside Sydney Heads. It was a strange freak of navigation; but not altogether uncommon; we had known ships hoist their topsails as we hoisted ours on leaving a West Coast port, slip their tugs at the same moment as did we, and then work away out of sight below the horizon, and never again be sighted until we forgathered again at the Channel's narrowing mouth, where the wide-winged ships of half the world seemed to be congregating.

"Keep her off a bit," said the skipper, and the man at the wheel put up his helm. We were going to run in within hailing distance; and the *Amethyst*, seeing our intention, graciously closed to the wind to lessen her speed. But our flags were still busy. Signalling at sea by means of the international code is not a question of lightning-like swiftness; any beyond stereotyped sentences must be tediously spelt out, letter by letter, and syllable by syllable. We hoisted our own port of departure and destination, the number of days out, and so forth, and then the inevitable question when a windjammer meets another craft in deep water:

"What is your longitude?" As our signal flaunted to the peak, the *Amethyst's* similar signal mounted above her rail; we answered simultaneously. There was a difference of twenty-five nautical miles in the two positions; a big lump of longitude when reckoned by mail-boat standards, but not so bad considering everything.

We were running nearer the ship now; we could see with the naked eye that she had suffered not a little about her decks. She showed gaunt and naked.

"Lost her boats," said the skipper; and the reason for her seeming gauntness was explained. "She's had her dusting."

He sent me for the copper speaking-trumpet—the more useful megaphone had not then come into common use, and let out a roar through it when it arrived.

A figure—the *Amethyst's* skipper confessed—one of the old type of seaman, with a tall silk hat on his head, lashed in place by ropeyarns, and a much-draggled frock coat on his back, climbed on to the poop rail and clapped a replica of our speaking-trumpet to his ear. Our skipper repeated his remark :

“Race you to the Heads for a fiver ! ” Now, there was something clerical in the appearance of that white-whiskered figure ; something savouring of Dissent and high principles. We boys expected at least an emphatic denial, and probably a bellowed sermon on the heinousness of gambling in any form. But we were mistaken. Barked back in a remarkable voice—a voice that treated the fresh gale as it were a summer zephyr—came :

“Make it a tenner, Cap’n, and I’m on.”

Our skipper threw up his hand in acquiescence.

“First to get pilot wins, eh ? ”

“Right—good luck to us both ! Had dirty weather ? ”

“Fair to middling ; you’ve been knocked about a bit.” Conversation lulled. There were so few subjects to discuss, and even those were more or less banal. Bad weather ? It was nothing to talk about. Hope of sighting land ? Neither was sure enough of his position to express a definite opinion !

Yet, if those two men had met ashore, in the back private room, sacred to skippers, of any ship-chandler’s establishment, they would have talked, yarned, argued, and “sent topsail yards down” till all hours of the night. They would have discussed and probably quarrelled over minute points of seamanship ; they would have deplored the inefficiency of modern crews, and the iniquities of shipowners, foremen stevedores, lights commissioners, and Trinity House pilots *ad infinitum*. They would have strayed into the realms of ship’s husbandry, with dissertations on cargo stowing ; they would have pricked off great circle courses for all the ports of the whole wide world.

They would have found common acquaintances in Apia and Archangel; they would have discussed men whose bones had long drowsed idly in deep-sea caverns; their tongues would not have been still so long as the store remained open or a drop of liquor hung in the bottle. But now it was more a time for action, skilled action, than mere words.

"See you've got little missy aboard!" came from the *Amethyst* after a long embarrassing silence. Gwen was naturally on the poop, for something out of the ordinary was happening.

"Daughter!" yelled our skipper.

"Bring her aboard at Circular Quay—my wife—savvy?" He pointed with his speaking trumpet to some obviously feminine washing that fluttered and slatted beneath the spanker boom.

"Seedy!" he roared. Another lengthy interval, during which time we lads grinned at other lads on our neighbour's poop: lads who, even at a distance, carried an air of greater smartness than we possessed.

"Bet that skipper runs a boat's crew properly in port," we opined. And we scanned the *Amethyst's* decks for her apprentices' quarters: mainly interested in the position occupied by our opposite numbers. There was a scuttle opening from the break of her poop.

"Berthed down aft, eh? Lots of cabin grub they'll get. Some fellows have all the luck."

"Well, I'll be pushing on, Cap'n; trouble you for that tenner in a week or two."

"I'll take your cheque, Cap'n. Don't worry to draw from the bank." The *Amethyst* was already heading away from us, widening the interval; slipping through the water at a slightly increasing pace. Up to her peak fluttered more flags:

"Wish you a pleasant voyage."

We responded, reciprocating the wish. Still another hoist: "Fear bad weather may be expected." We agreed. Then both peaks were denuded of

flags, save the ensigns which slatted vigorously to the breeze.

"Dip—three times." Down came the flag, to remain dipped for a moment, then to be run up again, once more to be dipped and hoisted, and yet again—like a man taking his hat off three times to a lady; but the ancient custom of the merchant service, and rigidly adhered to.

"Him and his tenner!" said our skipper. "Why, we can sail rings round him. Loose the main-topgallants'! We'll show him, if he wants a race!"

There is a distinct sporting element in merchant seamen: the word had gone the rounds that a race was meditated, and all hands immediately looked on the matter as a personal one. They had reviled the ship in a dozen different languages; they had named her for a limejuice warehouse, a workhouse-packet unworthy the services of good men, a heart-breaker, a slave-driver; but once an outsider dared to suggest that we were anything but the finest packet afloat, they were up in arms. It is doubtful if our ship's main-topgallant sail had ever been set so expeditiously since first the yard was crossed. One of the watch below skimmed aloft to loose it, thus breaking one of the sea's primary laws, that you may watch your ship dissolve to fragments beneath you and not raise a hand to interfere, so that it is your spell off duty; all hands clapped on the sheets and halliards. Up went the yard hand over hand—no need for chanting here, with a score of stalwarts on the rope—though we had experienced chanties even on the royal halliards on occasion: but that was when we were "sweating up" on a Sunday, to give us work, and when it was necessary to show the afterguard, by the only means in our power, that we disapproved of the "frigging."

We felt the added press of that big spread of canvas at once; there was an increase in our humming progress. But our challenge was noticed

and accepted; the *Amethyst* threw more canvas to the gale and promptly heeled over at a keener angle, with the spray whitening about her bows, and whole water pouring madly over her catheads.

"Loose the fore topgallants'l," shouted the skipper. "I'll show him!" It was done. It made for added discomfort, for by the time the forward sail was set we were burying ourselves, but the reeling log told us we'd added half a knot to our speed, spite of the drenching, and we would have endured anything short of actual shipwreck for the sake of proving to our adversary that we could sail seven knots to his six.

When night fell the *Amethyst* was well astern, dimly visible in the smother; a welter of white water all about her; and the clouds to south and west were banking grimly in promise of yet another real dusting. . . .

As it happened, it was a dead heat; but the pilot cutter off the Heads elected to visit our ship first; and we had won. But that was something like twenty-five days later; during which time we saw nothing of our rival, save that once, in the glow of a sunset, we thought we spied her far, and very far, astern.

And those twenty-five days were as varied as so many days well could be. They brought all the bad weather prophesied by the skipper of the *Amethyst*, and more. It was a case of storms *ad nauseam*. There were wild nightmarish hours when we grappled with grim destruction for the struggling fabric; when we resigned ourselves to the seemingly inevitable end. There were whole days when we clung desperately to the ringbolts and stanchions of the poop, what time the ship laboured so savagely that it seemed to us that every sick roll must inevitably be the last she took ere turning turtle and carrying us all to doom.

We fought on, because it was the only thing to do. Our strength was exhausted, but somehow the

sting of the whiplash of affliction roused us to the discovery of unbelieved reserves of strength; and, wan and red-eyed, walking like men in sleep, vacant of thought, acting in the main on instinct, we did the things that were necessary to be done and remembered nothing of their doing. That one man fell from aloft during the striving was an incident that aroused but little attention to our jaded minds. Secretly, I think, we envied him his peace after much fighting. He was buried without too much ceremony; though, with death as our familiar comrade through the darkling hours, we yet observed such rites as were ordained, and sewed up those pitiful, broken remains in fair canvas, with the flag that the man, living, had fought worthily for, though it was none of his own, draped over the shrouded corpse. A sea swung aboard and drove stiff figure and bier and ensign to the swirling scuppers; the battered prayer-book the skipper was reading from was torn from him and disappeared.

The tremendous words: "I am the Resurrection and the Life," were snatched from the lips of the speaker, the frenzied gale made a mock of them, but that they were true was proved to the hilt as we struggled to restore our late shipmate to a decent posture for the final obsequies. For a watery shaft of sunlight suddenly broke through blinding clouds and alighted clear on that rigid relic, and beyond the lowering masses that raged furiously across a leaden, hellish sky we sighted a gleam of blue. Hope, that peace existed somewhere in the distance, and that he was not yet dead.

Another of the hands smashed his thigh: he was torn away from the forehouse-top and crashed under a spare spar. There on the spray-washed poop, with the ship dancing the most fantastic jazz the mind of terpsichorean degenerate ever conceived, a piece of rough and ready surgery was performed. With handy-billy and ratline stuff the broken limb was

drawn into its place, by comparison with the other limb it was adjusted fairly; it was splinted and bound in bandages of tarred stuff that made it as secure as a rock; and recovery followed, curiously enough, though that broken leg was never quite the symmetrical limb it had been in the past.

We forgot the taste of cooked food; we were soaked in salt, and we held buckets to the gushing scuppers of the deck houses whenever a rain-squall lashed down, for our fresh water was all but gone; thirst troubled us; not a man but was abraded and half-rotten with sea-water boils.

Then, when we said human endurance could endure no longer, there smote down a lurid, never-to-be-forgotten southerly buster that picked us up as we were a feather and threw us bodily towards the Australian coast. Threw us, shattered, ravelled and gasping, into the soft peace of a perfect dawn, with a sweet following wind that dried our canvas and our decks, that filled our jaded souls anew with the glories of hope; that showed eager, watching eyes a thin blue cloud on the far horizon that was land at last.

We did not haggle with the stout tug that was crawling about outside the Heads. The sky was showing threats again; and, as we worked up the strait towards those great gates to the noble harbour of Jackson, we saw a great sailing-ship lying dry, with every stick still standing, on a smooth sandy beach that was not more than a few feet from the water, the only sandy patch for a hundred miles. We were, perhaps; and we had no wish to share her fate. In the black smother of night with a gale threatening afresh, with that stranded craft to point a moral, with the memory of the *Dunbar* to quicken us into apprehension, we closed at once with the tug-master, hauled his stout hawser aboard, and swung into safe haven; into a pictured wonder that was gladder to the sight of our eyes, I ween, than

the first opening of Paradise's gates to the eyes of a grievous sinner.

"Sheer luck," said the tall, sinewy pilot who now took charge of our destinies, referring to the stranded ship we'd seen. "Got mixed up in a southerly buster the other day; had to run for it. Her old man hadn't an idea where he was; black as your hat; no soundings, nothing. First thing he knew he was ashore—high and dry. Ship ran up as if she was being pulled up a slip. Half a mile either side and she'd have smashed herself to scrap. Not a man hurt, as it was, didn't even start her royal yards. No chance of salving her, they say. Crew put a ladder over the side and walked ashore as neatly as damn it!"

Verily, the age of miracles still endures on great waters!

CHAPTER XII

THE LAND OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS

WE had sufficient pride in our ship by this time to put a harbour-stow on our sails as we moved serenely up that glorious harbour—surely the most beautiful stretch of water in all the world. Men say Rio de Janeiro leaves Sydney amongst back numbers for beauty and grandeur; but I have seen both, and give my vote for the British haven: maybe because it is British and utterly lacking in that yellow fever menace which characterised the Brazilian harbour in my day.

Scene after scene of placid beauty unfolded itself to our eyes as we moved astern of the purposeful tug. There were gay and laughing beaches, fussing ferry-boats with many white-clad maidens to wave us a welcome from much stern voyaging; serene blue waters kissed to radiant loveliness by a breeze that seemed to bear no relationship to those frantic gales which had been our enemy; there was a graceful cruiser lying at anchor, with bunting lavishly hoisted about her, and gold and brasswork sparkling in the sunlight. With nattily squared yards, working feverishly to efface the indications of our purgatory from deck and sparring, we moved to our berth at Circular Quay, and—the glory of that arrival was lost to us in the main.

“What price a quart of sheoak to-night?” was the favourite question, as men licked dry lips on which the salt was still caked.

There was where our ambitions began and ended in the main: in the nearest dockside public where a

man might sink his blistered nose in the grateful froth of comforting ale!

"Me for a look around the Domain," said one man, notoriously a squire of dames of the frailer kind. "I like Australian wenches—no damned nonsense about 'em."

We of the half-deck thought less of wine and women than of more solid comforts.

"Sixpenny feeds—four courses and a second helping for the asking," was the burden of our pæan of praise for safe journeying.

"I feel as if my soul had been laid down in salt," said Slumgullion. "There isn't enough fresh meat in all Australia to sweeten it."

It is no part of this over-true narrative to describe the beauties, natural and artificial, of Australia's pride. The deep waterman sees but little of the lands he visits; his opportunities for self-culture and mind-broadening are as limited as his daily diet. The fact that we had reached port meant no lessening of our labours, truth to tell; it was simply that the force we represented was diverted to another channel. From six to six we should toil under the Australian sun; and then, like the busman, should have the rest of the evening to ourselves in a city where we knew no man or woman, and where deft snares were spread for our unwary feet. True, there was a Bethel, but—we were too vigorous and healthy to trouble about the welfare of our souls, and the spiritual part of humanity was catered for more fervently than the physical in that excellent institution.

Naturally, however, we were all keen on going ashore at first opportunity. We had dived deeply into our sea-chests for suitable attire; we had made a pool of such stock of so-called clean linen as we possessed—not much, for we had shipped more than one sanakatowzer of a sea in the half-deck that had wetted everything within, from blankets to white shirts—and, by general consent, these valued

requisites were evenly apportioned amongst us. We had covered up the most glaring deficiencies of our clothing as best we could; we had surveyed our badge caps with doubt and distrust; the first-voyagers had carefully sat on their own too-new caps to crush the badge into the likeness of an old one, that they might escape the stigma of first-voyagers.

Yes, we would assuredly go ashore. But as we muled away with heart-breaking wires and hauling-lines and mooring-chains when the tug deposited us alongside a handsome sailing ship of the Star Line, we found space to curse this reaching port, what of the labour it entailed in a ship where even on such an occasion as this the donkey engine was not requisitioned.

And when all the hauling and sweating was done, when the ship, stripped and trim, lay serenely at her moorings, when the butcher's boat had arrived with welcome stores of fresh provender, and the fresh-water boat had come along to give us a boon for which we craved more fervently than all the golden draughts of Lethe; we betook ourselves to the half-deck and—found letters, stacks of letters. No need to trouble about shore-going just then! We were in touch with home once more. God! how the eyes smarted and the throats grew husky at sight of remembered hand-writings! Four clear months since we had heard whether those we cared for lived or died! And here we were, with relay on relay of news to cheer or perturb us.

Slumgullion's brows wrinkled over the first letter he opened.

"Family mansion's in pawn," he declared. "Pater on the rocks—no sendee cash!"

"Have some of mine," exclaimed the always generous Ginger, handling crisp, crackling notes.

"One o' you boys get dressed and keep a gang-way—Cameron'll do," said the mate, thrusting his purple visage in at the door of our quarters, which,

because all of us were below at once, seemed smaller than usual. "Who'll sell me a letter for a plug of tobacco?"

He had received no single written word from a living soul: he had not expected one! Arrival in port meant nothing to him, save that he might, perhaps, pick up with some light love who would strip him of his earnings of the voyage in the inside of a week and then leave him, to employ the same tactics on a newer arrival.

Cameron, who was shedding fivers and postal orders from every letter he opened, apparently, grimaced when the order was given. Nevertheless, he had to obey; he attired himself in resplendent blue serge and gilt buttons and lace, and took up his position by the gang-plank, where he paced slowly up and down—the ship's ostensible guardian. But in a little while he was deep in discussion with an apprentice of the Star liner alongside; a youngster of his own age, and through the open port we could hear the pair of them exchanging expert opinions on the correct way to heave a ship to when the foremast had gone by the board and all after-canvas had blown away! There is only one type of man who can beat a couple of first-voyage apprentices who have run one Easting down at meticulous argument on intricate details of seamanship, and that class is comprised of ancient skippers who managed to weather the great cyclone of 1861!

It was very hot, and the sun beat down remorselessly on our iron home. And before we were permitted to go ashore—with half the apprentices kept aboard in case of emergency arising—there was much work to be done. Sacks had to be brought aboard and spread on the decks, to be wetted thoroughly, thus preserving the plank-seams from opening and allowing the cargo below to be wetted and spoilt; running riggings had to be flaked up the shrouds out of the way of the stevedores, who were

already busying themselves aboard and making havoc of our well-trimmed yards as they rigged the gins and falls that should rid us of our freight; a dozen duties had to be performed. If any of our youngsters had imagined that the moment of arrival in port was the signal for freedom from duty they were doomed to bitter disappointment. There was no general holiday proclaimed; we had, apparently, not merited such a concession. No, six o'clock was the time to go ashore, and not a minute sooner; though the skipper and Gwen had passed over the rail the minute the ropes were fast; Gwen, radiant and fascinating in snowy white, the skipper patriarchal and nabob-like in white duck and panama, looking as little like a sailorman as could be imagined.

But we went ashore—Slumgullion, Crowther, Ginger and myself. Sydney of those days was a city of uninspiring houses and narrow, straggling streets, with only one street of moment; and that, after attempting grandeur at its upper end, gave up the useless quest and decided to be a half-slum, with jaunty drinking-houses in large numbers, and many, very many of those cheap "skoff-shops" where the most strenuous appetite might be satisfied at a price of threepence a meal; or, if you wanted the Carlton and the Ritz, with trimmings, at sixpence a time.

It was seven o'clock when we reached George Street and turned into the most garish of the eating-houses; at ten we were still eating handsomely and drinking down great bowls of tea, richly sweetened and plentifully mixed with fresh milk! We said little, only expressive grunts marked our satisfaction. And when we were done Crowther capsized all the sugar-bowls into his handkerchief, slipped a fork and spoon up his sleeve:

"They'll all come in handy aboard that starvation packet," he explained. And—what next were we to do? There was nothing before us, save to perambulate up and down the street. This was

seeing the world: this was the realisation of our romantic dreams of happy vacations spent on sheep-stations, boundary-riding, kangaroo-hunting, perhaps, even fighting the bloodthirsty aborigines.

But perambulate we did: with our badge caps on three hairs, cultivating a heavy deep-water roll in our gait, to impress the beholders with the fact that we were deep-sea sailormen just up from the sea. The flaring publics had no attraction for us. The sorrowful sisters who smiled at us out of mirthless eyes left us cold—all save Crowther, who entered into clumsy conversation with one such, until a stalwart man-o'-warsman loomed up and, hooking her under the arm, smacked her resoundingly in the face, threatened to smash our shipmate's jaw if he said a word, and bundled her away without ceremony.

Then we were hailed boisterously by a number of forecastle hands, who had linked arms and were racing down the street, occupying its entire breadth, and singing vociferously as they went, whilst the understanding Australian policemen looked after them with shrugged shoulders and complacent eyes, knowing that no real harm would come of it all, and that the sheoak fumes would soon evaporate as the result of a good night's sleep, whether aboard the ship or on the dry turf of the Domain in a suit of newspaper pyjamas.

There was nothing for it—we must share in their rejoicings. They were as open-handed as sailors well could be. The skipper had arrived aboard, they said, and had given each man five shillings of his three months' arrears of pay, and for the time being they were monarchs at large—with the wealth of all Ind at their disposal. Attired fantastically in thick blue serge that looked as though hewn from a solid block with a none too sharp axe, with gay-coloured mufflers much in evidence, with hard bowler hats and "cheese-cutters" on their heads; sporting watch-chains as a mark of their temporary emancipation, they dragged

us into a drink-shop and forced brimming mugs upon us. And they talked—Lord! how they talked! All that they had endured during those wearing four months came to the surface as scum comes to the surface of a backwater; they damned the ship and her afterguard *en masse* and individually; they breathed dark threats of mutiny and desertion; of seeking out “the British Counsel” and obtaining satisfaction, until the strong beer deadened their rancour, and they decided that it wasn’t good enough that they should drink alone whilst old Hendrik still remained aboard, drinkless. Whereupon a party of volunteers set off for the ship, and we with them—intending to give them the slip at first opportunity, whilst the rest slammed their glasses on the bar and demanded more beer, as thirsty sailormen who had the right to drink until the new dawn came.

When next we saw them they were tearing down the street again, but this time they had old Hendrik with them. Hendrik had been told off as night-watchman, but they had seduced him from his allegiance, and they had filled him to the bung with sheoak; they were frog-marching him amongst them, and this they did until the swing-doors of a saloon showed fairly across their path. They halted as by common accord.

“Now, with a heave-ho—and awa-a-ay she goes!” bellowed Faulken’s monstrous voice; and through those glittering swing-doors the old man was propelled like a stone from a catapult. The doors swung shut soundlessly—and next morning the mate was requisitioned to bail the night-watchman out of the police-cell into which he had been carried by the guardians of Australia’s law.

Oh, yes, it was all very immoral: a strong argument for the rabid temperance enthusiasts, but—who was to blame? Here were strong men who had each worked a miracle or more, who had given death a miss in baulk not once but a hundred times; hefty

men, cut off for a third of a year from the amenities of civilised life, ashore at last, with no other guidance than their own sweet wills, and the resources of a city at their disposal, so far as five shillings apiece went. And five shillings had great purchasing power in those remote days, especially in Australia, where meat was twopence a pound and beer a penny a glass. Let others moralise; I paint the thing as I saw it. If you turn adrift men with the bodies of bulls and the minds of little children in a city where few care whether they live or die, you set them a definite course to the drink-shop and the brothel, the fault lies not with them, but with those who benefit by their labours and take no heed to the fashion by which they gain the amenities of an ordered life.

As for us youngsters, our pockets lined with money, untrammelled, our own masters until turn-to on the morrow—what might not have befallen us? As it was, satiated with food, overburdened with thick uniform clothing, we made tracks aboard for the genuine luxury of “an all night in.”

On the way we heard a thick, oily voice gulping : “Stoord, stoord !”

We halted, to find our grave black “doctor” : the man of portmanteau words, of great dreams of that happy place, Barbados. He sat on the curb, clinging gamely to a lamp-post. In his lordly mind he was still preparing a meal for the ship’s company under almost unsurmountable difficulties. He bade someone invisible to “ease her when she ’scends !” ; and he asked another invisible one how he expected him to make clean bread out of foul flour and tank-sweepings. He had not a little to say about our mulatto steward’s parsimony and utter greed. But, when we stooped over him and aided him to his feet, he blessed us with the dignity of a whole college of bishops, and entrusted himself like a little child into our kindly hands. After that one night he did not cross the ship’s rail again !

CHAPTER XIII

FRENCH LEAVE

ALMOST before we were decently in port we were ready for sea once more. Skilled stevedores ridded our holds of the burthen they bore; whilst we youngsters were kept actively employed on stages rigged outboard, scaling the rust of our recent travail from the ship plates beneath a sub-tropical sun that scorched the last of the Easting's clamminess from our marrows. O' nights we went ashore, to carry out the same programme of stodging and gaping; we visited other ships and criticised certain points of seamanship; we swapped endless yarns with other aspirants to the honours of the sea.

We had much to do, for the crew deserted almost to a man, and disappeared up country without leaving a trace of their whereabouts. Even the second mate deserted, lured ashore by some tow-headed barmaid to whom he had surrendered his too-susceptible heart; but he was discovered and brought back. Rhys remained aboard: his old enemy rheumatism had well-nigh crippled him, and he was full of good intentions of amassing a satisfactory pay day and bettering himself. There was much talk at this time of mighty fortunes to be won ashore in the silver-mines, and that glittering lure proved too much for the majority of our crew, who sacrificed all their arrears of pay without the smallest compunction and vanished into the unknown. We boys did their work for them, for substitutes were not engaged until the night before sailing. For us, soul-hardened as we were, desertion were professional

damnation; it meant cancelled articles and the forfeitures of the sea-time we had already earned. And we had object-lessons, more than one or two, when we went ashore, as we did whenever it was possible. Sheepish, unkempt, slovenly beachcombers would slink towards us, husky of voice, bleary of eye.

"What cheer, shipmate?"

We surveyed them at first with distrust, we grew self-conscious and embarrassed, not knowing what the hails portended.

"Apprentice myself — Line. Cleared out, couldn't stick the mate; a swine! Got the price of a drink?" It was usually the same story: they were down and out, fallen from their decent estate to such little measure as to cadge the price of a pint of beer from almost penniless apprentices. Sodden, they were, shameless, dropped to the dregs, these lads who had once been as we were, of good estate and high ideals. There were many of them, not only in Sydney. And what their ultimate fate would be who could tell? Human flotsam washed up on these unsympathetic shores where a man must work for his keep, as by the Scriptural law ordained: the best they could hope for was a foremast berth in some hard-case windjammer where their lives would be hell afloat. Others of them descended to even lower strata than that: decency deserting them, they touted for sorrowful sisters and eked out a miserable existence on such foul earnings as these. A nauseous subject; let us close it; and leave to others who prefer to analyse the murkiness of the average human soul the task of revealing the inwardness of these miserable human derelicts!

Before three weeks were over we were again under way, with a few "runners" to handle the ropes, in lieu of our late tried and proven crew. Rhys was revelling in an outfit that would have supplied a cruiser's company handsomely: every man who had

"skinned out," as the nautical expression has it, had endowed him with some portion of his surplus gear prior to departure; he took on an attitude of authority with the dishevelled fellows who had accepted a few shillings for the run round to Newcastle.

It was only a few miles away; it was not worth throwing our white wings abroad. We proceeded in tow of a tug to the coal-port, with dreary visions troubling us as we went. We had hoped and prayed that we might load wool or tallow for home and make a clean round trip of it; but the edict had gone forth: coal for Valparaiso for orders; load nitrates for home. The bleak West Coast was our fate: and we sophisticated ones scented little but misery and hardship for the coming months.

Still, it was part of what we'd signed indentures for; and maybe, on arrival there, a miracle would happen: the skipper might decide that he would run a proper boat's crew and so absolve us from the loathsome toil of working cargo to save the owners' tightly-locked pockets, or we might even be sent to 'Frisco, where all good things were to be found, amongst them a Bethel that was really attractive to youth, with a fighting parson, whose name sounded in our ears like a battle-cry, at its head.

So we slunk into Newcastle harbour, amid a whirl of far-blown coal-dust, and all our work aboard the ship, all our painting and scrubbing that had made the old tank yacht-like in shining beauty, were fouled and besmirched before our ropes were decently fast.

We did not lie alongside, as it was not yet our turn to load, and the berthing accommodation was not large. The skipper promptly proceeded ashore with Gwen, who had made a host of friends amongst the youngsters of Australia and who had given us the cold shoulder in consequence: friends ashore had invited them to stay with that ready hospitality of the older Australians which dates back to the days

when their forbears travelled out to the colony in sailing clippers and extended a welcome to all seafaring men by way of thank-offering for safe voyaging. And we youngsters were not officially allowed ashore at all. At any moment of day or night the order might come to take the ship alongside the coal-cranes for loading; we must keep handy. It was much like being at sea, save that in addition to the constant muling work of chipping, scraping and painting, stacking dunnage and clearing up the holds, we had the tantalising bitterness of seeing the shore—doubly, ay, trebly attractive now—so near and yet so inaccessible.

Even bathing was not permissible, by reason of the hungry sharks that rumour filled the harbour with; and the long evenings when work was done were a very nightmare, for the half-deck was all too cramped to hold the lot of us with anything approaching comfort.

And we got invitations to go ashore, too, from those kindly Colonials, to whom all decent seafarers were as friends and brothers—we had visions of home-life, decently served meals, laughing girls and moonlight dances—they drove us almost to distraction. Our money was long ago exhausted: the skipper had questioned us as to the amounts we had received from home, and, hearing, had promptly refused to issue a weekly half-crown dole. His soured nature seemed to take a curious warped delight in holding the cup of pleasure from our lips: or maybe I misjudge him, though I think so now; perhaps he considered it good for us bodily and spiritually to remain aboard ship out of temptation's reach.

Then the post brought an invitation, addressed to Slumgullion and myself. A shipmate of the previous voyage had written out to say that we were in the ship; would his good Australian friends extend to us the courtesies they had offered to him? Rather!

Wouldn't they! Would we, without fail, go ashore the next night and take supper with them? There would be a dance, perhaps a water-picnic.

"Girls—lashings of 'em!" gurgled Slumgullion. "Nice cuddly ones, not the Dolly Mop breed, thanks. Ever kiss a Cornstalk girl, Barnacles? They're like cream—yummy-yum." He licked his sinful lips with unction. "As straight as a die, too," he added. "No silly fooling."

"Well, what about it? We're not allowed ashore."

That was a facer: it made the town seem ten times more tantalising because of the embargo placed upon it.

"We'll ask the mate," we agreed, but without much hope. And our fears were verified. Mr. Perkins liked us little at the best of times, now, required to get the work of a score of men done by seven or eight boys, he liked us less than before. The loneliness of this existence was souring him, for he had quarrelled savagely with the second mate and the quarrel was not yet made up.

"No going ashore allowed," he said snappishly. "You know the order. If you want more satisfaction ask the captain—he'll be aboard to-day—for a change." The bitterness of his voice was accentuated by envy: were he skipper, as he had been, he too could go ashore whenever he liked and escape from the cloying imprisonment of the ship.

"Well, we will ask the skipper," Slumgullion said. It was so little to ask: merely permission to be absent for a few hours when the grinding work of the day was done. Merely the right to lower down one of our boats: the dinghy that had been crushed and repaired, and to scull ourselves ashore.

But the thought of our coming visit to the West Coast had evidently soured the skipper's temper, too.

"You're here to obey orders!" he snapped, when we deferentially approached him. He was all the

autocrat and nothing of the patriarch. One of the last voyage apprentices had interviewed the ship's owners in company with his father and there had been some plain speaking: hints on the part of our late shipmate's father of something almost approaching swindling, of tyranny and the like, to say nothing of underfeeding, and we gathered later, from Gwen, that the skipper had been placed on the carpet by his employers, thanks to "them damned boys." We survivors were objects of still keener dislike than usual: we were all potential enemies with fathers who might possess influence; but the old man's stubbornness would not permit him to soft-soap us.

"No one's allowed ashore," he said.

"That puts the lid on it," we decided, back in the half-deck.

"Well, I'd like to go," said Slumgullion. He reached into his bunk and took out our one big asset. We had long ago pawned our watches and everything else that could be turned into cash and "skoff." But by common consent we had held Slumgullion's big thick overcoat sacred. It was joint property, by the half-deck law; and a very present comfort when at the wheel on a cold night, or on the lookout. It was too long and heavy to wear about the decks, and once saturated it would take a month of Sundays to dry; but on crisp nights, when there were not many big seas coming aboard, it was a boon and a blessing indeed.

We looked at the coat and at one another. We were due to round the Horn sooner or later, possibly in mid-winter, when the gales would blow with razor-edged bitterness, when such a coat as this might save our lives, indeed. But that was months away, and—there was the invitation for the following night.

"We could fix it off all right, too," said Slumgullion. "The butcher's runner would come for us for this coat."

And so it was arranged; leave being refused we

proposed to take French leave. The butcher's water-assistant proved susceptible to our offer; we fixed matters up in secret. After nightfall he would be waiting under the bows. We knew exultation, mingled with apprehension. But the thing was workable. Once we knocked off work for the day it was hardly likely that our services would be required or our absence noticed. True, there was a chance, and discovery would mean a severe hauling over the coals; but once we'd had our pleasure, what did that matter?

We awaited the appointed time with growing eagerness. We dressed ourselves in shore-going rig complete save for jackets, and slipped paint-smear'd dungarees over the garb, and we showed ourselves ostentatiously to mate and second mate just as darkness fell. Then we loafed forward, where a rope hung from the boom-guys. In a little while we were in the faithfully waiting boat and shoreward bound. It was exhilarating, a hundred times better than going ashore in the ordinary way. We shook our fists at the dark bulk of the ship, whose denuded spars showed spidery against the Australian stars; we anathematised her skipper, we called the curses of the seven blind men of Hades on the head of old Perkins. Then we stripped off our disguising dungarees and donned the jackets we had lowered down on a length of spun-yarn, and stepped ashore as the Conqueror might have stepped on to Senlac beach.

"Yes, sure," our boatman said, examining the loot with appraising fingers; "sure, I'll be here between eleven and twelve."

We had not a cent in our pockets; but we stepped out pridefully. We avoided populous streets, however, lest the skipper should have fancied a stroll in the evening's coolth, and slunk through byways, asking questions as we lost our bearings. Then we found the hospitable house, and, pleasantly titillating, sought admission. Ah! the warmth of that door-

step welcome—we might have been brothers and sons returned after many years of absence. The house was wide open to us; there were laughing, pretty girls to give us their slim, cool hands, there were appetising odours that curled our nostrils and brought appreciative tongues to our sinful lips.

Into the drawing-room we were led by those light-hearted girls, to be greeted by our cordial hostess.

“How nice of you to come!” she told us. “And there’s a surprise for you.” She stood aside. We saw Gwen first, next the skipper!

But it was not so bad as it might have been in the event. A bitter frown was our first greeting from him who held the threads of our destinies in his fingers, a growled promise of what the future should hold. Our hostess was wise in the ways of sailormen, and she sized up the situation quickly.

“If they’ve done wrong and you punish them, Captain ———, I’ll never forgive you,” she said. And then appealed for generosity, an appeal which her daughters seconded, whilst Gwen added the weight of her persuasions, too; so that, ungraciously, we were told that we might remain for a little while. So the sun shone afresh, and our hearts resumed their normal beating, and we decided that the old skipper wasn’t such a bad old fish as all that—that he could tell a good yarn, yes, and even sing a good old rumbuling sea-song, too; whilst his abilities as a trencherman left nothing to be desired. We presently lost our awe of him; he even cracked a joke or two with us, and told our hostess that we weren’t altogether the worst of the boiling, though—he tempered his praise—we were a long way from being the best.

The evening was over all too soon. Silvery moonlight, the scent of flowers borne on a lilting honey-sweet breeze that dimmed the crashing of coal-cranes in the far-away harbour, the laughter in dusky eyes, perhaps a kiss here and there—and if so, who’s to blame?—and the tribulations of deep water seemed

very remote, very unreal, although we exuded a subtle suggestion of paint and turpentine and tar from our hastily-cleansed raiment. Here we were welcome guests, given a flattering attention; our words were listened to with as much deference as were the skipper's. We found ourselves promoted to be men of the world; we were no longer unconsidered drudges, ciphers in the scheme of things. And we began to feel as the evening went on that the skipper was just a little scared of us. He wanted to make a good impression here; he was afraid we might come out with disclosures that would paint a by no means flattering picture; he held his breath when we talked of shipboard matters, and we heard more than one sigh of relief as we skirted a dangerous precipice of conversation.

Yes, it was greatly good; the flavour of that stolen evening still lingers when other memories are dim and overlaid with the crust of the vanished years. We discovered ourselves dancing in the moonlight; piano-strains stealing from wide-open windows; and before, we had never known we could dance! We sang; we even trolled forth ancient chanties for the edification of our friends. We held Gwen in our arms and found her somehow a different Gwen—more womanlike, more alluring, than the half boyish girl we knew at sea, for she had donned something soft and lacy, something low about the throat; there was an unaccustomed ribbon in her hair, and—we were not above trying to make her jealous.

But it came to an end, all too swiftly. Gwen slipped something into my hand as we parted with a whispered: "Give that to the mate." It was an envelope, addressed in the skipper's writing, won from him by his coaxing daughter, who had taken womanlike advantage of his evening's unbending. And other gifts were thrust upon us, too—a basket of cakes and fruit and sweetmeats, and there were kisses one or two exchanged, I do not doubt, for

by the gate a huge eucalyptus threw an enticing shade; and we were entreated to get the habit of visiting there as often as we wished.

The harbour side looked very unlovely as we reached it; the coal-grime was doubly repulsive. The cranes that picked up laden trucks, tilted them, and shot their clamorous contents into gaping holds had never seemed so noisy; the ship, silvered by the moonlight, loomed up as a prison hulk, not a ship of faery lightness.

"They'd blame us if we skinned out, too," said Slumgullion bitterly. He had left his susceptible heart behind him beneath the eucalyptus, and had told me that I could count Gwen as my girl for the future! "Lord, wouldn't it jar you? That's what comes of being a bulwark of the Empire—a horny-handed jolly Jack Tar!"

"Well, we shouldn't have had such a stunning evening if we hadn't been sailors," was advanced as comfort. "And now, where's that boat?"

We were pulled alongside the ship, and to the bows; but the pendant rope was gone, and the gangway was hauled up to the rail.

"Old Perkins has twigged," we said. An interview with the mate would assuredly be in the nature of an anti-climax. We pulled around and about, hoping for a chance-sent rope; there was nothing to be seen. We ran under the bows and endeavoured to navigate the greasy bower cables, but beyond smothering ourselves with slime we gained no advantage; at the hawsepipes we stuck, nonplussed.

"Have to give it up and stand the racket," we decided. Remained then nothing but to hail the ship in the authorised fashion, and there was a chuckle in the watchman's voice as he answered. He was a new-comer to the ship; he rejoiced in our misfortunes.

"De mate, he twig you fellers skin out," he said. "He say you damn' well keep skun out till he let you aboard."

"Oh, let the ladder down and cut it out," we urged this jester. It had to be gone through with, and the sooner it was over the sooner to sleep, to forget embittering experiences. The gangway was accordingly lowered, with the usual squealing of block-sheaves, and we bade farewell to our boatman, who wished us good luck in the coming interview.

"De mate, he say you go aft soon's you come aboard; report to 'eem," the watchman told us. Which we did forthwith, wondering what would happen. The heated condition of his cabin had caused Mr. Perkins to sling a hammock under the poop awning; he was awake when we lifted the screen and trod that sacred planking.

"Ah—the bold deserters, eh?" he said. "A pair of beauties—if you like." That was his commencement; he worked up into a splendid crescendo of rage. No need to enter too closely into detail; he had been drinking a little, and the alcohol had ravelled the strings of his temper.

"We had the captain's permission, sir," said Slumgullion, as the mate paused for fresh words to fit the occasion.

"Eh, what? Don't tell me any lies, damn your eyes! Didn't I hear the old man refuse you permission, and you go lying and——"

"This might explain things, sir," I remarked, tendering the letter Gwen had put in my hand prior to departure. The sight of the skipper's writing acted like a charm. I don't know what the letter contained, but it caused a direct volcanic eruption to degenerate into rumblings. By the light of match after flaming match, the missive was read.

"Fine state of things! Boys can go stuffing themselves and fooling around with a crowd o' wenches—mates must stick aboard and graft! Don't think it's finished with, though. I'll have you two young——." The evil word was taking shape on his puffed lips, but he must have heard the simultaneous

forward shuffle of our feet. The word that was apology sufficient for any fighting was not spoken.

"You'll be in my watch next passage," he growled. "I'll see you're worked up; take some of that cheek out of you. Get below." He was rumbling as we left the poop, and for all I know to the contrary, he rumbled throughout the night.

But Crowther and the rest were eager to hear an account of our adventure.

"Old Perkins sang out for you two half an hour after you left," we were told. It was just the usual run of luck! For a fortnight of nights there had been never a cheep from aft; on the one night we elected to play truant we were in immediate demand!

"Wanted a couple of hands to pull him aboard the *Highland Minstrel*. Skipper of her is his great grandson or something—cadging free drinks, was our old Perkins. You ought to see her half-deck. Teak and brass everywhere; and apprentices are apprentices aboard that flash packet. Well?"

We smirked reminiscently, and hinted at such times as would have aroused excitement in the soul of the most blasé pleasure-seeker ever created. We spoke enticingly of the effect of southern eyes under the glamour of southern moonlight; Slumgullion smacked his lips over the succulence of southern kisses.

"Yes, but what did old Perkins say?"

"Oh, that was all right; we met the skipper and he fixed things off. Not a bad old bird, the old man." Whereupon we were seized without grace or favour, and compelled to tell a coherent tale, which was heard unbelievably, with much gnashing of teeth.

"I'll try that racket on to-morrow night," Crowther said.

But next evening we were alongside the coal tips, and free to go ashore, if we so willed; and the ship's tailor was aboard at the dinner hour, and we fixed off

our bargain that left us bootless going round the Horn for the sake of a few paltry shillings in our pockets; and there was no need to adventure down surreptitious ropes over the bows.

And then, before we realised how time was passing, we were again in tow of a plucking tug, with our bow pointed eastward again, and fifty days of wear and tear ahead of us—Valparaiso our immediate goal.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

“ ‘ Rowlin’ ’owme, rowlin’ ’owme, rowlin’ ’owme, ercrost ther
sea,
Rowlin’ ’owme ’—I down’t think—‘ to dear owld Hengland,
Rowlin’ ’owme, dear land, tew thee ’—not ’arf.”

“ Tew Orstralier’s bloomin’ dorters we must bid a fond ajew;
We shall ofttimes think with pleasure of the hours we’ve
spent with yew.”

THE middle passage is always a bit of a worry even to the most experienced seamen. It leads nowhere: outward you have the satisfaction of working off the dead horse; homeward—well, you are homeward, and that is quite enough to be going on with. But West Coast bound brings no pleasure; there is every prospect of nasty weather, and the certainty of weeks and often months of lying at moorings, two or three miles away from the shore, under deep-sea conditions, so far as food and water go, to all intents and purposes; and, worst of all, two or three thousand tons of coal to shovel out of your holds and discharge into lighters, before the nitrates can be laden for home. The only thing that could be said in favour of the nitrate coast in these days was that it was healthy. Otherwise, it had no attractions. But we second-voyagers, in the accustomed manner, thrust upon the youngsters the fact that they ought to be preciously thankful for even such small mercies.”

“You should have seen us last voyage, and then you’d have had something to talk about,” we said. “Up to Lobos Islands for guano—that ’ud warm you up. On the Line almost; and you didn’t only have

to work out the coal at Iquique, but you had to work the guano in—load it into the lighters ashore yourselves, and pull it off through the surf, and then load it into baskets and trim it in the holds when it came alongside. Try eleven weeks of that sort of graft and then you'll know what you're talking about."

"We'll have to load the nitrates ourselves, though," ventured Bubbles, who, because he had discovered a youth in Newcastle who had only been to sea for six months instead of seven, as he himself had been, was commencing to give himself the airs of a naval petty officer at least.

"Not we. One man'll do the stowing, and do it jolly well, too. We'll be scrubbing and chipping and painting on surf days and when the homeward cargo's coming aboard."

And we all summed up the future succinctly.

"Anyhow, it's a hell of a place at the best."

But we had to go, there was no getting out of it; and so for close on two months we plugged across that ocean which is the least appropriately named of any, for peace seems not to enter its borders—at all events, not along the Great-Circle route from Newcastle, N.S.W., to Valparaiso.

But it was an old story, and we were by now hardened to the worst the seas and gales could do. Curiously, a morbid apathy seemed to settle on the ship when the tug cast us adrift and left us to our own devices. There was no chanting when the topsails were mastheaded; men pulled laggardly on the braces. We had shipped what we could get in the way of a fore-castle crowd, and they were an unpromising lot. Clean whites are all right, whether they be Scandinavians or Britishers; but this polyglot assortment of ours were the refuse of the ports. They had no heart in them; they seemed to lack the sporting element which makes for harmony in the trying conditions of deep-water life. At the outset there was a quarrel between port and starboard forecastles. The

leader of the latter, a so-called Cockney, who bragged of his foulnesses, happened to admit that he had sailed in a ship where a gross murder had taken place. Rhys took him to task for not interfering—as a Britisher. The Cockney said he wasn't so fond of trouble as all that, and his watchmates supported him. Rhys, old as he was, and half crippled by rheumatism and heart-weakness, pulled the Cockney's nose, and when he let go the slime of his gutter-bred tongue, slammed him under the spare spar.

The newcomers had shipped in sorry case; they were to all intents and purposes shanghaied, with such paltry kits as the boarding-house keeper had seen fit to grant them in return for two months' advance of pay. One decent fellow there was amongst them all. He had been a midshipman with Devitt and Moore; he had risen to second officer in the P. & O. From that reputable line he had been discharged. What for, we did not know, but we gathered a woman was concerned in the matter, for Pedrick had much to tell us in night-watches of the folly of running after women on shipboard. He held to the current seafarers' belief that the feminine moral code is suspended on deep water, especially in the Red Sea. One of his tales had to do with a young girl sent out in the captain's care to marry a man out East. During the passage she indulged in lovers a many, and threw away the greatest gift life had granted to her. Her regular lover awaited her on arrival; as he trod the deck in welcome she flew to his arms like a dove to its nest, and informed him that she had almost died of longing and loneliness during the trip!

"Women are like that," said Pedrick bitterly. "If you're intending to steer a straight course, 'ware women! They always mean trouble of one sort or another." And there was that in his voice that hinted of tragedies bigger than the tragedy of Mark Antony.

No, life was not a bed of roses during the run across

the Pacific. The food was getting worse than ever; the fresh vegetables shipped in Newcastle were rotten; short commons were the order of every day. Water was scarce, too, for though we had filled our tanks prior to leaving, there would be a shortage on the Chilean coast, where water is as valuable as wine, and it was necessary to conserve our supplies. Gwen was miserable: perhaps she contrasted the dreary monotony of life aboard ship with the changeful holiday she had indulged in ashore, and, too, she was showing signs of jealousy—we had paid too much attention to those Newcastle girls! The second mate, hungering for his tow-headed barmaid and the job of “chucker out” at a cheap saloon, went about with a grim face and a ready fist.

Everybody was quarrelling and fighting: we looked like prizefighters before we were half-way across the ocean. Slumgullion and myself quarrelled and sulked for a fortnight—an unbearable position, and we neither of us knew or cared what the quarrel was about. Ginger lost his sweet equableness of temper and brooded darkly on the joys of suicide, wished he had deserted in Sydney and joined the American navy. The mate was much as he always was, but he well remembered his threats in Newcastle. He transferred us to his watch and worked us unmercifully. But we gained one great advantage by this transfer: we had Rhys in our watch, and Rhys was worth his weight in gold. After declaring his policy to the newcomers, he remained undisputed cock of the walk forward; his word went; he was the oracle and the *arbiter elegantum*, and fighting did not come his way. And when Ginger, goaded beyond endurance, slammed the second mate over the head with a bucketful of sand and water, it was Rhys who, with an unmoved face, swore to the skipper that the second mate had dreamt the whole occurrence!

“I was there,” said the A.B. “I heard the second officer call him foul names and say unmentionable

things about his mother and sisters. Had it been me that was asked to stand to that, I would have knifed the officer. But the boy did nothing——”

“Then what’s the reason why Mr. ——’s head is laid open and his hair full of sand?” asked the captain.

“There was a bucket of the stuff on top of the for’ard house; the ship rolled, the bucket fell off. Maybe the orf’cer was standin’ beneath, sir.”

But after the inquisition was over and Ginger was acquitted, against the second mate’s sulphurous evidence, Rhys solemnly tendered a lovely half-model of the ship—hull, sea and sails all carved from solid timber—to Ginger as a token of appreciation!

“Next time,” he adjured solemnly in presenting the gift, “kill the swine! It’s such as him makes mutinies. God help us all! In a decent company he’d be kicked out of the fo’c’sle an’ sent to herd with the pigs.”

So, with much bad weather, much wrangling and ill-will, with no little tyranny and at least a soupçon of hunger, we crossed the Pacific, and sighted the high Andes dim and blue against the skyline. The wind fell light as we approached the land; and there had been some small fault in the reckoning: we were well south of our port. For a night and a day we drifted aimlessly, wandering here and there at the will of the changing tides, with never an air to lift the drooping canvas. We could see ashore a desolate land, unpeopled; not a building revealed itself. And along that high and inhospitable shore we marked a broad white line that the glasses showed to be bellowing, high-flung surf, thrust shorewards by the resistless Pacific swell. We were not surprised to receive orders, after dark, to see the ground-tackle clear for running. A cast of the lead gave us fifty-five fathom water and a bottom of hard rock. A brooding atmosphere of suspense appeared to settle down on the ship; men talked in low voices, with apprehensive

glances outboard. At eight o'clock a cast of the lead gave a bare fifty fathoms, and there was a dull droning rumble audible when we strained our ears.

"That's the surf," said Rhys. "I've heard it call like that afore; an' next mornin' I was without a ship, only my shirt an' the mate's seaboots to keep me company. If it came on to blow from the west'ard, we're for it as sure's Heaven's full of little angels."

And, to help us to forget, he promptly discoursed upon Valparaiso, as it had been when he visited it on a previous occasion. It was at the time of the Chilo-Peruvian war, and Rhys saw the gallant little *Huascar*, nobly fought against overwhelming odds by a very brave French officer, who died in doing his duty to the flag under which he had elected to serve, brought as good prize into the great harbour, defiant even in her defeat, with her scuppers running blood.

"The Chilanos ran alongside her an' carried her by the board, sonnies; after they'd blown the guts out of her. An' the first man to meet them was the *Huascar's* cook—him with but an axe to fight with; an' he cut the head of the Chilano captain in two clean halves as he set foot over the rail. An' the captain would have blown her up but that he was lyin' dead in his own conning-tower. Say what you like, the French are *good* men when they are good."

And history has proved the worth of that assertion!

"And to this day," said Rhys, his voice a-tremble with admiration for the gallant seaman, "at any grand parade of the navy an' army there might be in Peru, the first name that's called out is the name of that same French captain. First on the roll, he is, always. An' when the name is called, doesn't a brass-hatted bigwig of an orf'cer step forward an' salute, an' say: 'Absent but accounted for; he's with the heroes'?"

But stories of glorious deeds at sea in no wise lessened the growing precariousness of our ship's

position. We were in danger—that was apparent even to the meanest intellect. No breath of wind blew up to give us steerage way, and we were being drifted surely on to a ragged reef of rocks that would pierce our paltry plates as if they were thin paper.

"Rather larks to be wrecked," said Ginger.

"Wonder if they'll count it sea-time whilst we're ashore?" Slumgullion ventured.

"There are nasty folk ashore hereabouts," Rhys told us. "Outlaws an' wild men; they'd skin a flint for its hide, an' take the shoes off the feet of the Apostle Paul."

The watch below hung about the decks, loath to go below; though in the heaviest gale we had yet encountered they had made for their bunks the moment they were relieved. Proximity to land, and especially to what one might call unauthorised land, is viewed with apprehension in windjammers: there is no sea-room for manœuvring, no means of winning clear. Gruesome wreck tales were the order of the night. The long, shore-running swell was still considerable, the ship rolled savagely, but the banging of the inert sails was not due to any providential flutter of a breeze. In the general relaxation of discipline that had set in Gwen came down to the after-hatch, where we talked in low tones; and gave us useful information concerning the land, which she had culled from some ancient gazetteer of a hundred years before. According to her information, cannibalism was the least of the evils we had to fear. And Bubbles admitted sheepishly that he had pawned his invaluable pinfire revolver in Sydney, "blowing" the resultant cash on ice-cream and fruit. But, by reason of the strangeness of everything, Gwen buried the hatchet and took us again to her friendship. She showed a great disinclination to return to the poop; we knew why. Our skipper, who had weathered raging gales with equanimity, had been taking Dutch courage aboard by way of strengthening his nerve;

we heard his voice raised in oathful upbraidings several times; once Gwen had charged down the ladder with her hand to her tingling cheek.

"Heave the lead!" cried the "old man" at about ten o'clock. It was hove by the simple means of dropping it over the side. Forty-five fathom water and a rocky bottom!

"Stand by your anchors, mister."

"Stand by your anchors, sir! Chips!"

Frederiksen, appointed carpenter, vice the late tradesman killed on duty, lumbered in elephantine fashion to the great windlass beneath the forecstle. The anchors were already catted outboard, hanging on the tumblers, one pull on which would release the great mud-hooks.

The mate ambled towards the forecstle head. He betrayed no concern whatsoever; going ashore in this fashion would apparently cause him as little perturbation as towing into port at the end of a hawser.

"All ready, Chips?"

"All ready, sir."

"All ready for letting go, sir."

"Right; let go!" There was a tearing crash, a savage rattling of cable that seemed to go on interminably. Then a few kicking jerks, a crash or two as a fresh length of chain roared out over the windlass.

"Seventy-five fathom abaft the windlass, sir."

"Right, hold on to that." We breathed more freely. The surf was clamouring loudly, and we could see, looking overside, milky streaks of foam about us; we were in the backwash of the breakers. The mate came aft, cutting tobacco for his pipe.

"Brought up, sir. Shall we get the muslin off her?"

"No, leave it hang, mister. There's no wind—no wind!" It was almost a cry from the man who feared but little in the way of wind. And I think some of us understood what was in his mind, though we had but little love for him. Here was he, in imminent

danger of losing his ship in almost ignominious circumstances, he who had brought her safely through the worst weather three oceans could show! And there was so little to be done to save her. Wind, her motive power, was absent, and she was, in consequence, unmanageable. There was nothing to do save hang on to the bottom—a bottom of hopeless rock—and wait for better times.

The difficulty was to hang on to that bottom.

“Come with me for’ard, for the fun of the thing,” said Rhys, who had been tending the lead-line, which was still overboard. We went, and he bade us place our hands on the cable. It was plainly to be felt: a shaking vibration that was infinitely awe-inspiring. The currents were tearing viciously at our hull, and in fancy we could see the heavy anchor leaping sportively along the sheer rock ridges forty-five fathoms down. We were dragging, and dragging hard.

“Say naught about it yet,” said Rhys. “’Twill only worry the old man, who has enough worries meanwhile.”

We looked overside again: the milkiess about us was thickening and curdling. The crash of the breakers was growing louder and louder. Once, peering shoreward, we thought to see a few faint, moving lights.

“Them’s the folk that pray: ‘God bless father, God bless mother, God send a ship ashore before morning,’” said Rhys. “They’re waitin’ for to pick up the fragments that were left, an’ there won’t be seven basketfuls either, once we get into the muck.”

He hesitated a little, then walked aft.

“Anchor’s dragging, sir,” he reported.

“Mister Mate!” clamoured the skipper. There was no immediate answer, the call was repeated, until the mate came up from below. Perkins was by way of being an opportunist: the captain couldn’t leave the deck, but he had left the grog bottle down below.

“Want me, sir?”

"They say she's dragging—dragging." The skipper's voice was tearful.

"Yes, sir?"

"Let go the other anchor." The mate went forward. In his lordly mind he no doubt felt capable of leaping overboard and swimming the ship clear by his own efforts. Magnificently he laid hold of the lever that should release the port anchor, and forgot to warn the carpenter to stand by the windlass! There was a crash, a monstrous crash, and a rumble of chain that caused the ship to quiver and squirm like a thing in its death-agony. We of the deck-watch ran forward, sensing something was wrong, to see bright sparks leaping from the hurrying cable, to see it hammering against the deck-beams overhead as it ran, unbraked, at its own sweet will.

There was a Clydeside man amongst us; he watched the proceedings gravely for a moment.

Then, with reference to that hurtling, savagely clamorous chain, which was entirely out of control, he said solemnly: "Mon, if that hit a mon it wad break his pipe!" The carpenter made a valiant effort to reach the brake, but was driven back, with the flesh of a forearm torn to bloody ruin. On thundered the cable, until there was a snapping report like a gunshot as the connecting shackle burst from the keelson; the bare end of the chain flickered up, hit the deck-beams a slap that dented and bent them, and disappeared overside through the hawse pipe.

Was the mate distressed? You have secured a false estimate of his character if you imagine anything of the kind.

He clambered down to the main deck. "Wouldn't that jar you?" he asked. "Who's got a match?" When his pipe was relighted he trundled himself aft.

"She's still dragging, sir," he reported conversationally.

"My God! Let go the other anchor! Let go the other anchor!"

"It's gone, sir—chain as well."

There was an inevitable heated argument, that ended only just short of fisticuffs. Nothing more could be done; unless the remaining anchor held, we were apparently done for. We had a spare anchor, lashed abaft the foremast, but we had no spare chain.

And the bonds of discipline were relaxing; the men were losing confidence in the afterguard. You could tell it in their voices, their oaths, their manner. Finally they went aft in a body and demanded that the boats should be provisioned and hoisted out.

And the necessary orders were given. We were going to abandon the ship to her fate. We youngsters felt a pang—she was a workhouse, a slave-ship, a stinking phantasy of a ship, but she had been our home for months—some of us had lived aboard her for years; and a man understands the fondness he can know for a ship when the time comes to leave her, as he realises the worth of a horse when he claps the kindly pistol-muzzle to its ear.

"Take a shift of clothes—smooth water—plenty of room."

We bundled the best of our outfits into canvas bags, and passed cases of food from the lazarette to the lifeboats. The mate came walking sedately, bearing a mighty, brand-new portmanteau.

"Put that in our boat," he said; and we stowed it away in the sternsheets of the port lifeboat. Presently all was ready and the boats were lowered away, a couple of hands in each. The ship thrilled and shuddered to the grating of her anchor over the rocks beneath.

Then the upper sails lifted and flapped.

"A breeze, by Gawd!" No, the flat calm held relentlessly.

"Stand by to abandon ship!"

Stay, though—the sails flapped again; the land-breeze was striking down from the towering Andes. Another flapping, and this time a longer interval

before the distended canvas relaxed and thudded against the masts. And the rumbling shivers were lessening. Then a hum of movement all about, a harping aloft, cool breaths on our faces, a yawning, silky sound from the disturbed water overside, and the ship was all aback.

"All hands man the capstan—wash out that abandon ship order."

We trooped forward in a body, we shipped the capstan bars; someone started "Away Rio," the capstan chanty that touches the heart of deepsea rovers the world over.

"Oh, walk her up!"

By two o'clock the anchor was at the hawsepipe; with a vigorous breeze the ship was steadily increasing her distance between herself and the threatening land.

"Poisonous old hooker, she is," said we—she was a workhouse again!

At the first glimmer of dawn we were set to work to clear the raffle on deck. We were very dishevelled; ropes were everywhere. The boats hung in the tackles outboard, where they had been hastily secured as we gathered way. Skipper and mate, worn out, were below; the second mate kept the deck.

"Let's see old Perkins's idea of a change of clothes," we said, spying that lordly yellow portman-teau in the port lifeboat. It was not locked; it opened readily to our touch, to reveal—a bottle of brandy and a bottle of port; nothing more! Mr. Perkins had his own idea of the rigours of life on an inhospitable shore.

Five days later we towed into Valparaiso, and saw the splendour of Aconcagua: a ruby crystal, shining as though illuminated from within against the star-set bewilderment of the purple sky.

And another fortnight found us lying in the tier at Iquique, with a prospect of three months' hard labour before us.

CHAPTER XV

WEST COAST FASHION

AND it was hard labour. There were three thousand tons of dusty Newcastle coal in our holds, and every pound of it had to be shovelled into sacks and baskets and delivered into the grinding, bucking lighters that came tediously from the shore and went as tediously back. No hours of ease for us of the half-deck now; we must work as never before; twelve good hours a day at the coal, on such days as were not *fiestas* or surf days, when the lighters failed to come alongside; and on off-days we must work with patent scrubber and scraper and chipping hammer, with paint-pot and tar-brush, under a pitiless sun, by way of holiday. Not until the last shovelful of coal was out of the ship would there be "liberty" for any of us; we were as closely penned as though at sea. At something before five each morning four of us pulled the gig ashore—three good sea-miles if an inch—to get the Chilano tally-clerks; and if we were a minute later than six o'clock in getting these yellow-skins aboard there was a row of magnitude. Straight from the boats to the holds we turned, to busy ourselves with basket and shovel, choking in the horrid dust, clad in singlet and dungaree pants alone—we gentlemen-ropehaulers who were learning the profession of an officer! A bare three-quarters of an hour for breakfast at eight, a bare hour for dinner, and then a swift dive overboard, clothes and all, to wash off the worst of the filth; and so to the boat once more to land the tally-clerks—twelve miles of hard rowing together with twelve hours of hard shovelling; but we were as hard as nails and as fit as men could be.

Digging down was the worst of it; it took us a fortnight to reach the ship's floor where one might secure a decent shovelful of coal for the stooping. Heart-breaking labour this—to scratch and pick at the horrible stuff and to lift a corner of a shovelful as a result. Best to draw a veil over the months: there was nothing of romance or adventure in all of them. The scorching sun—we were only a few degrees south the Line—blistered us as we toiled; the *maté* drove us like a slave-owner; there was no lagging. They formed us into gangs which worked against each other, each trying to speed the other up, each trying to get its baskets filled faster than the other. Back-aching work, blistering work; necessary, perhaps, but hardly sailorising; and ashore were hundreds and thousands of peons who would have been only too willing to take the task in hand for a paltry sum per diem. But our owners had their own ideas of profits; we were there—potential labour, to be employed usefully, in order that we might learn the virtue of obedience.

But we were lighthearted enough with it all. We chantied up Bubbles in a basket when we got to the skin, and were rewarded with a tot of grog; we held a sing-song that night and practised high diving from the mainyard into the pellucid sea. One night, in taking such a dive, the writer rubbed against something living down in the deeps and felt cold horror grip his heart. He fought a mad way upwards—it was horrible—horrible to think of dying down there in the gloom, torn to fragments by a man-eating shark. And on the surface he found himself *vis-à-vis* with a harmless hair-seal, as scared as he himself was! We had swimming races; we manned the copper punt and had races with that against any other ship's punt that cared to compete. When we took the tally-clerks ashore we challenged other ships' boats to a contest and pulled like 'Varsity blues, all out, going our hardest, for the sheer love and lust

of the thing. We chaffed the yellow *vigilantes* on the landing mole as we waited for our tallymen; and, when they drew their bayonets and breathed fire and destruction, we rushed ashore and hurled them neck and crop into the sea, because we were young and hard, and the blood ran redly in our veins.

Often and very often, returning from landing the tallymen, during an unsatisfactory meal of leather-tough goat and hard biscuit, we would be told that we had to take a boat ashore again to bring off the skipper, who was frolicking about the saloons; and we would go and wait till after midnight ere he came singing down the mole, with half a dozen other skippers to bear him company, all of them elated, all of them sending topsail yards down at once; and we would hear, with sinking hearts:

"Your boat not here, Cap'n? Never mind; my boys will put you aboard. Do 'em good, a bit of work—keep their passions down." That meant a trip clean round the widely-extended harbour, with a prolonged wait at each ship's gangway, whilst the boatload of skippers was busy in the cabin. But, whatever the hour at which we arrived back to our own ship, we were under way for the shore again at five o'clock, and there was no lying-off from that everlasting shovelling.

Sundays were our only breaks. The joys of a Saturday half-holiday were unknown to us, for if no lighters came off we worked about the ship until six or after; and then were usually told off to row the mate ship-visiting. On Sundays we washed the week's accumulation of grime from decks and rigging, made the ship trim and orderly, and then bathed ourselves as best we might, attired ourselves in go-ashore clothes and set off to the Bethel ship, where the local Mission held a bright, go-as-you-please religious service, with whatever hymns we cared to choose, and a short, straight-to-the-point address. And when it chanced that a ship down from

Portland, Oregon, or 'Frisco, was chosen as Bethel ship, we made cupboard love to the half-deck crowd, so that they would give us a sackful of that delicious Yankee biscuit which is about the best form of wheaten food the mind of man can conceive. And we would coil down on the sea-chests in these various half-decks and swing clean round the world in our reminiscences and arguments; we would discuss ships and their skippers, their cooks and their stewards, to all eternity and beyond.

And on Sunday afternoons, if the omens were propitious and the skipper in a forbearing mood, if there were no odd jobs of work to be done, or no water available for washing our clothes, we would borrow a boat and pull about the harbour, visiting ship after ship—ships of all countries and house-flags; from the one-time Melbourne clipper reduced to coal-carrying because her trade was being captured by faster, more regular steamers, to the five-masted German nitre clippers, which ramped home round the Horn in all weathers, laden to their scuppers, Valparaiso to Falmouth in fifty-seven days being the record they strove to improve upon every time they got their anchors and shook their storm-canvas loose.

Or we would discover that some coastwise Pacific boat had an officer aboard that one of us knew, or that someone we knew knew, and we would visit there, to gladden our eyes with the sight of a deck that was not frowsy with coal; to dream greatly of the coming days when we should, in our turn, tread such spotless planking, clad in seemly white with appropriate decorations of gold lace, monarchs of all we surveyed, admired by dark-eyed Spanish girls; sitting at meat as gentlemen should, with snowy linen and glittering silver and glass about us, with deft-handed stewards to minister to our wants; instead of eating off chipped enamel or rusty tin, off a clothless table, with grubby hands and, as often as not, neither knife nor fork to aid us in our feeding.

And we would accept the "you poor devils" sympathy that our acquaintance besprinkled us with; as we accepted his offer of tea in his cabin, or even dinner at a discreet corner of the saloon table; and we would buy fruit and vegetables and a dozen things from the hawkers who lined the big ship's decks, and pull back aboard later bursting with good provender and envious to the back-teeth of the glories we had seen and that should be ours, by the grace of the sea-gods, ere many more years were past.

Only one real event occurred to stand out beacon-wise amongst those many days of toil. The West Coast custom ran in those years, that whenever a sailing ship—and there were dozens constantly in the port—completed her lading, she cheered ship prior to leaving harbour for the battle round the Horn. Like most shipboard ceremonies it was simply an excuse to obtain free grog from aft. As soon after sunset as possible the ceremony started.

You would hear vigorous chanting come from the homeward-bounder, there would be a few fireworks, perhaps the braying of a drum or the skirl of a mouth-organ. And then, taking the ships in their order, some leathern-lunged individual aboard would bellow:

"Three cheers for the ——!" The swinging salvo of cheering that followed was heartening; it called forth a speedy response:

"Three cheers for the homeward-bounder!" They were given, responded to by a "tiger"; then the next ship in order was taken, and so on. Next morning all ships would send one or two spare hands aboard to help the lucky one get her moorings in, the many captains would gather on her poop and accompany her out to sea in tow of the tug; there was revelry in abundance, a tot of grog for the volunteer helpers; and then, when miles and miles away to sea, a hurrying into the boats that had been towing astern, and a riotous homeward race, twenty

boats' crews pulling their hardest and the skippers offering unheard-of, generally unrealised, bribes to their boys if they won.

One night a big German started in to cheer ship. She was laden deep with nitre; she was a clipper, and she had vowed to beat the best record home. How it happened none ever really knew. The last cheers had died away; her crew were chanting heartily, a flare was let off. Within a few minutes more someone shouted: "Look at the ——!" We looked. It was a clear moonlight night, one of those amazing tropical nights when there seems but little difference from the day. We saw a high pillar of smoke shoot upwards towards the stars; it was based by hungry fire. Then the smoke swept away, the ship was ablaze, every spar outlined fiercely in the astounding radiance.

"Out boats!" commanded the mate, and we tumbled into them. Off we went, pulling as we had never pulled when racing, to see dark heads showing in the yellow-gleaming sea. Impossible to approach the ship; she was incandescent, the sea about her was steaming from the appalling heat. Her yards were crashing down as the flames roared up and licked them from their fastenings; her sails were shrivelling; crash! a mast went, another. There were five thousand tons of nitre blazing there, and there was no power on earth could extinguish it. A dozen men were burnt badly; several of them died. Three days later the shell-like hull was still red rot, and boats could not approach within a hundred feet.

Not long afterwards we completed discharging our cargo, and on the next Sunday the port watch were granted liberty ashore, with a couple of Chilano dollars apiece to see them through the holiday.

Slumgullion, Ginger and myself went as well. I could write much, and very much, of that brief spell of leave, but space is lacking. We ate hugely, as was natural; we went visiting curious dens, where

gambling and drinking were rife. We took car-rides out to green oases in the wilderness of sand and nitre; we did everything there was to do; and I suppose we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly; but a book would be necessary to detail all our doings.

When we got back aboard *Ginger*, smoking a meditative corn-husk cigarette which spilled its tobacco all round the half-deck floor, said:

"They've preached to me in my letters about the temptations of the land; it's been the keynote of every sermon aboard the *Bethel* ship. Don't see any temptation—it's all too damned beastly for words. Those things aren't women—not the same sex as the women we know. I don't know that I want to go ashore again in this sink, thanks." And in the main we agreed with him. Vice, as seen on the West Coast, lacks allure. Not until the brain is steeped in the fumes of the poisonous alcohol they retail in the drink-shops can the average human being see anything tempting in the pitiful painted sisters who smile their grim, ghoulish smiles of invitation beneath the plastered paint, who ogle the passer-by out of eyes that are too misty with shame-bred tears to shine.

But when, the following Sunday, the starboard watch went ashore, things stirred in the world of action. There had been a bitter feud between two members of the fore-castle crowd: one a Swede, the other a Norwegian and a giant of a man, a man of almost incredible physique with the strength of a bull and the heart of a little child. On returning aboard the previous Sunday the Norwegian, primed with liquor, had sought to heal the breach by an offering of the rotgut brandy he had smuggled aboard. The Swede had accepted all that was offered; to all appearances friendship reigned. But when the Swede returned from leave, his senses inflamed with liquor, he promptly set forth to work off old scores. The Norwegian, scenting trouble, laid low; it was no use. All the starboard watch

decided there should be a fight; they dragged the Norseman from his bunk, and the fight began. The Swede manœuvred until he got his opponent back to the yawning fore-hatch, then he struck. We in the half-deck heard the crunching crash of the fall, as that mighty falling frame reached the exposed kelson thirty feet below. Clean across the bitter steel he fell; and when we youngsters reached him he was a wreck of a man, broken appallingly. Not dead—it had been better for him had death claimed him then. Broken and battered, he was patched up as well as we youngsters could do it, the drink-mad Swede clamouring for what little life was still left in the shattered frame, until Rhys hit him under the ear and sent him to sleep for that night at any rate.

There was no growling amongst us as the boat was called away to pull ashore in search of a doctor. We strained to the oars like galley-slaves; but it was not until the dawn broke that we could secure surgical aid. Back to the ship we went, believing that a man's life depended on our labours. Hansen was still alive. He was conscious, too, and with consciousness had come the knowledge that for all life he must remain but a broken wreck of a man. He never walked upright again.

There was no more liberty after that; what had been granted was already too much. The little longing we youngsters had remaining for the shore vanished; the West Coast was to us a loathsome place.

The loading of the ship was all too laggard, though it proceeded apace. We wanted to get out to the clean open sea, where tragedy, when it came, came cleanly, as it comes in war. There were no regrets when, after "cheering the harbour," we got our anchors, and with the usual company of skippers on our poop, with the half-deck crammed to bursting with envious lads who had still to put in months in the port, we made for the open waters that were our highway to England and home.

CHAPTER XVI

HOMeward BOUND

"We're homeward bound this gladsome day,
Good-bye, fare you well; good-bye, fare you well;
We're homeward bound to Falmouth town;
Hurrah, my boys, we're homeward bound!

"The Falmouth girls have the tow-rope now,
Good-bye, fare you well; good-bye, fare you well;
And hand over hand they are hauling us home,
Hurrah, my lads, we're homeward bound!"

How we did let that gallant chorus rip as we threw our weight on the capstan bars and walked the rusted, barnacle-smothered cable through the hawsepipe!

"Heave an' break that hook! Falmouth next stop. Oh, heave and break it!" we shouted.

There were some twelve thousand miles of riotous ocean before us; there was old Cape Stiff threatening sinisterly—Cape Horn in August month, and we'd no hard-weather gear worth worrying about; but we were homeward bound at long and weary last; and laughter rioted in our souls. We knew we should be lucky if we got home within four months, laden as we were to the Plimsoll, with the heavy, non-elastic cargo built up pyramidwise in the holds to prevent the old packet being too cranky; we knew we should be lucky if we got home at all; but what of it? Let the winds and seas do their worst; time enough to worry about them when they came; meantime, we were on the last lap, and that meant something. The hardest pully-haul they could give would be dainty, hobby-like work by comparison with coal-shovelling; we had the clean seas before us; no more

coal-dust, no more smearing away with boot-topping at the outer plates.

So we opened our lungs and gave the chanty sheet-oh; and when the tug blew its warning note, we swarmed up aloft as nimbly as ever men did swarm—partly to get the ship on her own, and partly to show these visiting apprentices, who were still awaiting their skippers' pleasure, how we did the trick aboard the old ——.

There were hurried good-byes, cheering from the boats as they left us and dropped away; but we were too busy now to take heed which ship's boat led in the homeward race; we were throwing our own muslin to the gracious, favourable wind that blew steadily from the north with promise of more to come.

We had worked off that black mood which had troubled us across the Pacific; we had come to discover that our shipmates were better than we'd thought them; harmony was the keynote aboard us now; we'd learnt, in the hard school of labour, how to pull together.

And pull together we did for many a week, the weather growing colder and bleaker, and the swing and hurl and lift of the mighty seas becoming wilder and more menacing as we slogged towards the south.

"Never mind; more days more dollars," we cried, when the wind came strongly from the south-east: a dead muzzler. But when we got down to somewhere about sixty south, and the wind blew hard from the east-north-east, with old Cape Stiff still to round, and the threat of the Diego Ramirez on one hand, and the chill of the southern ice on the other, we began to think the size of the coming payday was a small thing by comparison with the magnetic allure of home.

Followed biting days, when the rigging was shrouded in ice that had perforce to be broken away before we could clamber aloft to handle the stiff-frozen canvas; when spindrift whirled across our decks and

froze solidly as it fell; when our noses were blue and our blood congealed; when a man must needs sit down and weep real tears of agony on coming down from aloft, because of the anguish in his fingers and toes through returning circulation. Never a glimmer of fire in the half-deck, though icicles hung from every beam above us as we slept. Coal cost money, coal-smoke ruined the sails—let the boys chance the ducks, anyway! What did it matter to owners snugly ensconced on the Wirral that premium apprentices wakened at one bell to find their blankets frozen into the semblance of armour plates, what of the congealed breath about them? They got us cheap, and there were dozens more waiting to be taken on—Britain's tribute to the sea that fed her.

There was the promise of brewing trouble when the foredeck crew laid their heads together and decided that as they had signed articles to trade between sixty north and sixty south, they had fulfilled their agreement when the ship crossed the parallel of sixty and went cruising round towards the seventies; but the skipper met them with the mandate: "No work, no grub."

But only the ship's necessary work should be done; there would be no frigging jobs, no work-up arrangements. The mate fumed as he watched us idling aft during good daylight hours. He wanted to send us below into the holds to chip and scrape the beams and stringers and frames there—we should be warm and dry, and there was plenty of room to breathe, for although loaded to the marks, the ship was still half empty, so weighty was the cargo; and the work had to be done somehow. So the boys—who had no rights or privileges, who were compelled to do what they were told, irrespective of its injustice—were sent below, and there they told off one hand to rattle with a hammer to give a semblance of activity, and the rest slept serenely on the hard nitrate sacks.

So we slammed on, half under water, half under ice. God! it was cold, bitter cold. Cold and damp, so that we wakened with chattering teeth, as we crawled beneath the blankets with chattering teeth. If only we'd not been such idiots! If we'd got hard-weather gear in Newcastle, instead of blueing the cash on cakes and fruit and ice-cream! Too late, these regrets, but very sincere. The good resolutions we made as we shivered at the wheel would have completed a hundred-mile-long mosaic pavement in the Pit.

Hard grey skies, with the thin slivers of cirrus cloud to tell us of more wind; high grey seas rolling with mountainous sweep; sharp, black fangs stabbing upwards through mist-ridden foam—and those were the *Diego Ramirez*, we knew; floe ice to the southward as we ratched back from the imminence of the land—day after day went by, week after week was flung into the insatiable maw of time: and still we were wind-bound, struggling up and down between fifty-five and sixty-five south, looking for a favourable slant. The skipper swore, so Gwen told us, that unless a change came mighty soon, he would up-stick and run for home round the Cape of Good Hope; but always he hung on, believing that sooner or later the slant he whistled for assiduously would come.

Lord, didn't the old hooker make a hog of herself! She was as pliant as a sack of iron filings; she had no sea-kindliness, thanks to the dead weight on her floors. And the nitrates were draining themselves; the bilges were filling, and it was necessary to pump her out frequently—we manned the clanking pumps, and toiled there knee-deep in icy water until the remnants of ancient grain-cargoes choked the wells and we could pump no more until the carpenter went down to set matters right.

And then, when hope was dying in our souls, when we swore bitterly that the *Flying Dutchman* was nothing extraordinary, and that we could give him

points, the weather abated; we were left rolling and heaving on a sea of curdled lead. There was wind coming, and we knew it—big wind, such as blows around the austral pole. The skipper knew it, too; and we got the old packet snugged down in time—just in time, for when it came away it was a snorter, if ever there was one. But it was favourable at long last. Lord! but we deserved it if ever men did! And the old tub bestirred herself and notched her nose to the desired point of the compass that should lead her clear of all her troubles.

Thus she ran, whilst hope and happiness had new birth within us. It was rough going; as bad as anything we had known, perhaps, for the bite of the wind was vicious and freezing, and we saw much loose ice afloat, which imperilled our safety and kept additional hands on the lookout. What of it—we were slanting for home, and the log-line was running to the bare end every time the log was hove!

* * * * *

She showed first as a blur against the grey immensity; a trivial speck in the watery wilderness. Even thus there was a suggestion of forlornness about her; there was nothing ordered or purposeful about her movements. Later, as we drew nearer, it was observed that a wisp of ragged bunting streamed from one of her shattered masts. It was the red ensign, and it flew Union down.

We had no love for our skipper, but—there was not even a suggestion of hesitation in his manner this day. It is to be presumed that the sight of that appeal was like a trumpet call to an old war-horse, stirring all the deeps of his unostentatious heroism.

"Yes, of course we'll try," he said. "There's a chance."

"Good," old Perkins nodded. He knew that the real fighting work would devolve on him, but he betrayed no extra emotion; he was altogether unflur-

ried. "I'll call for volunteers so as not to waste time, sir." And the call went out for all hands to muster aft.

There were no mock heroics in the business; it all seemed very ordinary. Had Mr. Perkins been an orator here was his chance to show the worth of himself in that capacity. He might have appealed to the British spirit that laughed at risk and welcomed the opportunity of proving itself in the face of big odds. He did nothing of the sort.

"We're going to try our luck," he said. "I want six men—*men*. Stand forward, volunteers." Then he expectorated over the side and knotted the strings of his sou'wester beneath his chin a bit more tightly.

Six of us shuffled forward, one by one, with glances at one another. Some of us were afraid of seeming afraid in our shipmates' sight, I think. The mate made his selection quickly, like a man wishful to get an unpleasant task over as rapidly as possible.

"Put on your lifebelts, take off your seaboots," he ordered, and we obeyed. "Get the port lifeboat cleared away—all the dunnage out of her." It was done, men working willingly. The skipper and mate and second mate held a short conference on the poop, staring towards the wreck. We who were going had scant time in which to observe her; we were too busy. But she presented an aspect of utter forlornness. Her masts had gone by the board; the seas made clean breaches of her. There were shapeless objects in such rigging as still remained.

"I'll pour a drop of oil out," the skipper said. "Make things easier, eh? Break the weight of the seas, y'see. No need to give you tips, mister—you've done this sort of thing before, eh?"

"Once or twice. Yes, oil's a good idea."

After that it was a dim, misty uncertainty. Our ship swung to windward of the wreck and hove to—it was done very smartly. As she came round oil dribbled from her scuppers, and the wave-crests

subsided sleekly. Somehow we were in the boat, clutching at the thwarts as the craft swung giddily, thrusting outward with all our strength lest one of the great rolls should stave in the flimsy planking like an eggshell. It was all blind hurry, with nothing of orderliness anywhere.

The mate slung the after-tackle clear, and I heard him grind curses from between his teeth as the block swung back and smote him sharply on the head.

"Sharp!" he added, as the last objurgation died away. "Leggo, for'ard!" A moment or two of wild frenzy followed; the forward tackle-block proved obdurate.

"Damn it! Leggo! Who's the —— sodger in the bows? Shove off—fend her off!" A yelp as a man's knuckles were ground between gunwale and steel plating; more curses as water laved us comprehensively.

"All gone, for'ard."

"Shove off—*now!*" Out of the mistiness we emerged, our oars flying wildly. The boat was up when we thought she was down; down when we thought she was up; the oars would not bite; we fell back and sideways.

"Short strokes—don't panic, for Heaven's sake! Now, get at it!" There was a curiously shaped darn on the jersey of the man in front of me. As he swung forward the threads opened to show a grimy shirt beneath, and the shirt was torn. That is practically all I myself remember of the outward trip. True, we were adrift in the wild South Atlantic in a yelling gale; true, at any moment a wave might make havoc of the lot of us, but that darn and the rent shirt beneath captured the attention. One pulled his hardest automatically, because unless this was done, disaster would overtake all hands. It was hard work, but those long pulls in Iquique had not been wasted. When the man behind was gasping and coughing hollowly I felt myself breathing freely—second wind

had come. Only once do I remember glancing out-board—to see a ragged, grey-bearded sea lifting high.

"This finishes it," was the thought. "*Must finish it.*" But by some trick of the steering oar Mr. Perkins threw our stern to the peril; we lifted with a roar of fierce wind about us, some water swirled over the mate's shoulders and crashed amongst our feet.

"Come on, now—put your back into it. *Lift her!*" Then he was cursing us with bitter oaths that stung more than did the whipping spindrift; oaths that would have brought savage rejoinders aboard the ship; here they acted as a spur.

We'd show him! Call us those names, eh? And we were trying our damndest, too!

"That's better—get at it!" His voice was like the croaking harshness of a watchman's rattle, a driving force. It quickened our blood when it ebbed with weariness. We'd show him! He didn't seem to think we were heroes at all; it was just like hoisting a reefed topsail when we'd been muling about for days. He hadn't the decency to praise us, to call us little tin gods. But we'd show him!

He knew what he was about, this soured and disgruntled mate of ours. No horse ever worked so well for praise as for lash and spur, and he was driving us with consummate cunning. We would have murdered him cheerfully—if it hadn't been that everything was really in his hands.

"In bow! Look out, for'ard."

We had been labouring for interminable hours in noisy blackness, streaked with ragged red shoots of fire. Our chests were like to burst, tightening bands were about our brains; we couldn't do any more; we couldn't—couldn't! But the command awakened us into sentience again. We'd done it—we'd crossed that yelling space. Incredible, of course, and in a second more we should be at it again.

A rope, weighted at the end, hit the mate's face a crack that sounded like a pistol-shot.

"Gawd! can't you look what you're doing? Got it!"

After that it was easy. They had cut the wreckage away, and it was quite safe to approach to leeward of the wreck. She was badly knocked about; sinking evidently. Ragged steel plates bent ridiculously were over our heads—we were thrusting off with oar-looms and bleeding hands. Everyone seemed to be shouting at once; heavy feet kicked one in the back, in the head, anywhere, as the survivors came sprawling down. They were blue with cold, their teeth were chattering, they were limp, almost hopeless, showing but little outward signs of pleasure in their rescue. They obeyed the mate's orders like sheep. The bearded skipper was last to come; he brought a box with him: the ship's papers; a drenched cat spat and clawed at his oilskins and squalled fearfully as he wrenched its body under his arm.

"You the last, Cap'n?"

"Yes, sir." Even under these conditions the meticulous politeness of the sea was not abated.

"Let go, for'ard!"

"All gone, sir." The black clouds shut down again. Chief impression now was that the man who shared the thwart with me was a damned nuisance; he would get in the way, spoil a fellow's stroke. When he collapsed backwards over the thwart with a grunt, it was a welcome relief. Afterwards he said I had knocked him into the bottom of the boat, and seemed aggrieved about it—he was the wreck's second mate, not long over his apprenticeship, and as dignified as one in such case could well be. He may have been right—he was a nuisance, and there was a feeling within me that only by my own exertions could the ultimate goal be won. Every other man thought the same.

Best not to look at the boiling seas now; they were affrighting. There was no smooth film of oil spreading from the wreck; the effects of her lee were trivial.

Our skipper had sailed round to leeward of her, to make things easier for us; but, all the same, it was heavy, risky going, and the boat was loaded nearly gunwale deep, for we had secured fifteen men by way of salvage.

Of course, we should never do it, never! But we'd shown we were tryers, that was the main thing. We couldn't do it; the oars were weighted with lead; they were at least a hundred feet long, uncontrollable. We were under a curse, like Vanderdecken, doomed to go on swinging up and down with these overpowering pendulums everlastingly chained to our arms, until the crack of doom. The man behind was gasping horrible profanity; the darn on the jersey of the man in front had broken adrift—serve him right!

What was this? A sense as of something monstrous impending over the boat; much more noise—a big sea was about to fall, of course, for there was the mate working the steering oar like a scull, spitting everywhere, his long moustache blown ridiculously over his ears.

A stench of decaying animal matter, a bump, many more curses.

“Good egg!”

We'd done it. We were alongside the ship again. “Get her aboard, mister. Grog oh!” That was all there was in it; but we'd robbed the sea of fifteen human lives.

It was eighty days later, after much more sea-fighting that differed in no wise from what had gone before, save that we were even more scantily fed—what of the added mouths aboard—that Slumgullion and I skipped aloft to the fore-topsail yard. It was black night, with a fair and wholesome breeze blowing from the westward.

“We'll have a look, anyway,” we said. We looked to the north and east. There was a thin sheen ahead; it grew a little brighter as we strained our eyes. Two distinct sheens, indeed.

"Light right ahead, sir," we yelled, and heard the faint "Ay, ay," come back in answer.

"That's the Lizard, sure enough. What price the Falmouth bumboat to-morrow?"

The bumboat came up to all expectations; we had three months' arrears of eating to make up.

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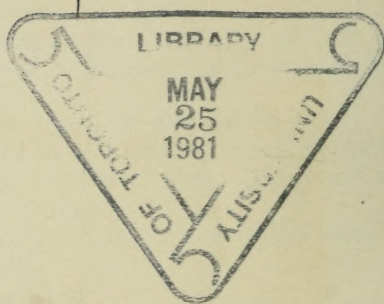
Many days afterwards we were paid off in Antwerp, towed thither by a powerful tug. Rhys scooped in some forty pounds sterling—a voluptuous assortment of notes and gold.

"I'll go home with this," he told us. "I'll cut out windjammin'. A job in a Liverpool tug's about my mark."

Three days later, as we waited for the Grimsby boat to take us to our homes, Rhys appeared on the quay. He was far from sober, disordered in his gait and general appearance.

"I wondered if one o' you might lend us half a crown," he said.

So there was an end to the battling and the reckless daring, as there was an end to the paltry reward for such service. What has become of him? God, the God of the sailorman, knows! But when the winds howl o' nights about the bedroom windows, when the chimneys moan and the rain slashes savagely, borne on the wind's wings, I can see again the good old ship striving gallantly, with white water bursting all about her, and I can see those old shipmates, grim-faced and inarticulate, fighting stubbornly, with their backs to the wall. And sometimes I count myself a traitor in that I have deserted the craft of baffling the cunning of the great waters.



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